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### THE BLUE MOSQUE OF MESHED

In the whole universe there is nothing more beautiful than the venerable Mosque of Meshed.



# THE DANCING GIRL OF SHAMAKHA AND OTHER ASIATIC TALES

*by*  
COUNT DE GOBINEAU

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AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION BY  
HELEN MORGENTHAU FOX

ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
MAK

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## *Translator's Preface*

SINCE the preface of every book on the Orient begins with a discussion of the spelling I will fall in line too. All the Persian words in this book were spelt as the French spell them. I have used the English spelling except in the case of a proper name such as Omm-Djehane, who is a very well-known character, where I have kept the French spelling.

Monsieur de Gobineau writes as a tolerant, kindly philosopher with a delightful sense of humour. The book is impersonal, impartial, and objective. The characters are not shown as "different" or queer, but just as they truthfully are. The author is not preachy or censorious, and the book shows how fine and interesting the oft-despised Oriental is. Gobineau writes with the detachment of a scientist describing a species, and yet with a human touch.

The stories have an epic quality. Although the characters are a soldier, a girl of ill repute, or a spreader of carpets, they are portrayed not merely as individuals but as part of the whole picture. Their virtues, vices, talents, and foibles are characteristic not merely of one man or woman but of the type, the

## *Translator's Preface*

race, the nation. Gobineau was a philosopher and student, and his rich mind and experience give his stories a universal, lasting appeal. He draws them in the setting of their origin, history, social and physical surroundings.

I have read all I could find on the Near East ever since I lived there and have never found a truer or juster portrayal of these people by a Westerner.

It is my hope in making this book available to a wider circle of readers that more people will come to understand and like the men and women living in the Near East.

HELEN MORGENTHAU FOX.



## *Introduction*

**M**ORIER'S novel entitled "Hadji-Baba" is undoubtedly the best book on the Asiatic temperament, with the exception of "The Arabian Nights"; these latter are peerless, they are truth itself and can never be equalled. The author of "Hadji-Baba" was secretary of the British Legation at Teheran at a time when everything appertaining to the East India Company shone with the valour of the Golden Age. Morier had really seen, known, and fathomed everything he described, and in his pictures he used the most careful drawing and colours that were perfectly harmonious. But there is one point to note. This delightful author was making a book, and this book, like all books, was written from a single point of view. He depicted the levity, the inconstancy of mind, and the tenuity of the moral ideas of the Persians. He developed and treated his theme admirably. He drew his model standing in one position and rendered this perfectly without omitting anything; and he neither wished to do more nor could have done so. He might have gone further than the lines indicated by the position of his model, but this



## Introduction

he did not do, and he cannot be blamed for not doing it. The fact remained, however, that he did not show everything. For this reason, and because there was no point in doing again what he had done so successfully, I decided to write not a novel but a series of short stories. This would enable me to study and render what I wanted to show under more varied aspects.

I did not aim to show exclusively, as Morier did, the more or less conscious immorality of the Asiatics and their strong tendency to lie. I showed this too, but that was not enough. I wanted to describe the bravery of some, the romantic ideas of others, the innate goodness of these, the deep-seated integrity of those; how some are carried beyond all bounds by the passion of patriotism, some by whole-souled generosity, devotion, or affection; how all are incomparably indolent and are absolute slaves of their impulses, whether these are good or evil. I did not want to confine myself to one setting, and that is why I transported the reader to the *aouls* (villages) of the Circassians, to Turkish, Persian, or Afghan cities, to the bosom of fertile valleys and often into the midst of arid and dusty plains. But after all my efforts to assemble different types dominated by varied occupations and in very dissimilar regions, I am far from believing that I have exhausted the treasures into which I have plunged my hands.

## *Introduction*

Asia is so old a country and has seen so much and preserved so many remains and impressions from all it has seen that the number of things to be observed can be multiplied to infinity. I tried my best to seize and keep what seemed most salient, striking, and strange to ourselves. But there still remain so many things that I have not been able even to suggest. I shall have to console myself with the thought that even if I had gathered more material I should scarcely have diminished the sum of the interesting curiosities that remain untouched in the mine.

It is a feeling common to all workmen to wish to limit their tasks so as to finish them sooner. The cabinet-maker who makes a table or turns the splat of a chair has no more of this tendency to laziness than the philosopher working out a problem. Each is working for a result and is generally none too critical of the value of his creation, being satisfied that it is effective and up to the proper standard. Of the men devoted to the study of human nature, the moralists have been particularly eager to arrive at well-sounding conclusions; this has been their aim, and consequently they have lost themselves in words. Never since this parasitic sect of the moralists came into existence has it been quite clear what the value and function of these men are; the censure which they deserve for the inconsistency of their point of departure, their incoherence, the frivolity of their deductions

## *Introduction*

should have classed them centuries ago amongst those pretentious chatterers who talk for the sake of hearing themselves. Among the meaningless sayings we owe the moralists, there is none more typical than this axiom, "Man is always the same." This axiom is on a par with the pretensions of these self-styled thinkers to reform all the wrongs of humanity by obliging people to accept their wise counsels. It has never occurred to them to ask how they were going to change this human mechanism which creates, grows and directs, exalts the passions, and determines what is wrong and vicious, the sole and final cause of what occurs in soul and body.

As opposed to what the moralists teach, men are nowhere alike. A Chinaman plainly has two arms and two legs, two eyes and a nose, like a Hottentot or a Parisian; but it is not necessary to talk an hour to each of these beings to perceive and conclude that not a single intellectual or moral bond exists between them, except the conviction that they must eat when they are hungry and sleep when they are tired. On all other subjects, the gathering of ideas, the associating of ideas, the nature of these ideas, their opening, flowering, and colouring, they differ. It is reasonable, indispensable, praiseworthy, and pious for a Negro living in the country south of Lake Chad to massacre a stranger the moment he lays hands upon him, and if the latter's last breath is drawn out of

## *Introduction*

him by a finely graduated, modulated, and applied torture, everything is as it should be and the conscience of the torturer is perfectly at ease. Let the same stranger fall into the hands of an Arab in Egypt and there will be no peace, truce, repose, contentment of any kind until he has been deprived of his last cent and had everything except his shirt taken from him. The Negro and Arab do not agree on their way of treating mankind. But imagine the two in conference with St. Vincent de Paul! What would these three have in common? Introduce a moralist as a judge of the discussion. Do you think he could still maintain that men are the same everywhere?

It is because men, everywhere, are essentially different that a study of their passions, views, ways of seeing themselves and others, their beliefs, interests, and the problems they are engaged in, is so interesting, varied, and alive; and it is important to study these things in order to understand the part that men, and not man, play in creation. This is what gives history its value, poetry a good part of its merit, and the novel its whole reason for being.

The object of the tales here assembled is to show different types of the Asiatic mind and how this mind, observed in its general aspect, differs from ours. The observers who are filled with this truth are those who have shown that they are best qualified to live among the Persians, the Afghans, the Turks, and the people

## *Introduction*

of the Caucasus. When this fact is forgotten and one comes into contact with these people solely to describe them, nothing but absurd judgments can result: they are found to be perverse, and nothing but perverse, merely because they are not like Europeans. The conclusion to be drawn from this judgment necessarily is that they represent corruption, while the Occidentals represent virtue. In order to escape such an absurdity, it is very important not to speak of Asiatics in the fashion of the moralists.

It may also be worth while to learn what has become to-day of the first civilizers of the world, the first conquerors, the first scholars, the first theologians this planet knew. Their senility will perhaps lead one to reflect on certain signs that are now appearing in Europe and that suggest something analogous to the same decrepitude.



## *Contents*

	PAGE
THE DANCING GIRL OF SHAMAKHA . . . . .	1
THE LOVERS OF KANDAHAR . . . . .	85
THE WAR OF THE TURKOMANS . . . . .	151
THE ILLUSTRIOUS MAGICIAN . . . . .	219
THE STORY OF GAMBER-ALI . . . . .	275

## *List of Illustrations*

THE BLUE MOSQUE OF MESHED . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	<small>FACING PAGE</small>
THE DANCING GIRL OF SHAMAKHA . . . . .	58
THE LOVERS OF KANDAHAR . . . . .	96
THE WAR OF THE TURKOMANS . . . . .	206
THE ILLUSTRIOUS MAGICIAN . . . . .	224
THE STORY OF GAMBER-ALI . . . . .	312

*The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*



## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*



ON JUAN MORENO Y RODIL was a lieutenant in the infantry at Segovia, when his regiment was involved in an abortive military insurrection. Two majors, three captains, and a couple of sergeants were caught and shot. As for him, he escaped, and after

wandering unhappily about in France for several months he succeeded, through some acquaintances, in securing a commission as an officer in the Russian service. He was ordered to join his corps in the Caucasus, where good, rough warfare was the daily fare in those days.

Lieutenant Moreno embarked from Marseilles. He was naturally in a grave frame of mind; his exile, his unhappiness and, above all, his deep sorrow at leaving a woman whom he adored for many years, increased his usual seriousness so that no one was less tempted than he to seek the joys of life.



## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

After a tedious trip, the craft that bore him landed at the little town of Poti at the end of the Black Sea. At that time, this was the principal port of the Caucasus on the European side.

Along the partly sandy, partly muddy beach, covered with bog grasses, stretched a thick forest, half in the water, which continued on land for a great distance and followed the course of a wide stream in a winding bed full of rocks, mire, and trunks of drifting trees. This was the Phasis, the golden river of antiquity, now called the Rion. Fever reigned in the midst of a vigorous vegetation, and everything that belonged to animated nature suffered as much as the vegetable nature prospered. Fever as a sovereign usurped the sceptre of Actea and the children of the sun. The houses were built in the stagnant water and were lifted in the air, to escape inundations, on piles made of stumps of big trees that had been cut down. Enormous sidewalks of planks connected them. The heavy, shingled roofs projecting beyond their thick turtle-like shells protected the narrow windows of their houses as much as possible from the frequent rains.

Moreno was impressed by these novel sights. It was known on board ship that he was a Russian officer, for he had declared himself as such. That was why, as he wandered, homesick, through a wide street, he saw coming towards him a very blond young man

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

with a noticeably flat nose, slanting eyes, and an upper lip with a sparse moustache like a cat's bristles. The young man was not handsome, but nimble and well-built, with a frank, cordial look. He wore the coat of an officer of the engineers and the silver shoulder-knot belonging to members of the corps who had distinguished themselves in their studies. Without noticing Don Juan's reserved greeting, the young man spoke to him rapidly, as follows, in French:

"Sir, I just heard that an officer of the dragoons of Imeretia is at Poti to join his corps at Baku. You are that officer. As a fellow-officer I place myself at your service. I am travelling the same road that you are. If you like, we will travel together, and as a beginning I beg the honour of offering you a glass of champagne at the Grand Hôtel de Colchide which you see over there. If I am not mistaken, the dinner-hour is not far off. I have invited a few friends and you will not refuse me the pleasure of introducing them to you."

All this was said charmingly in that sprightly manner to which the Russians have fallen heir since the French, who are presumably its inventors, have lost it.

The Spanish exile accepted the newcomer's hand and answered:

"Sir, my name is Juan Moreno."

"I, sir, am Assanoff, that is, I am really Murad, son of Hassan-Khan; I am a Russian, that is, a Tartar

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

of the province of Shyrcoan; a Moslem, at your service, that is, in the fashion that Monsieur de Voltaire might have been one,—a great man!—whose works I read with pleasure when I have not got those of M. Paul de Kock at hand.”

At this, Assanoff put his arm through Moreno's and led him to the square facing the river where, from quite far off, a large low house could be seen, a long barracks, on the front of which, in white letters on a sky-blue board, could be read: Grand Hôtel de Colchide, kept by Jules Marron (senior), all in French.

As they entered the room of the hotel where the table was set, the two officers found the dinner-company already assembled, sipping vodka and eating caviar and dried fish to stimulate their appetites. Some of these especially merit being mentioned: two French clerks, one of whom had come to the Caucasus to buy silkworm eggs, and the other to procure grained wood, a taciturn Hungarian traveller, and a Saxon lace-maker on his way to Persia to seek his fortune.

These are mere supernumeraries in our story. We will pay especial attention to the following: first, the mistress of the house, Mme. Marron (senior) who was to preside at the feast.

She was a good, buxom person who had surely passed forty but by no means left on the other side of that frontier her pretensions to charm. Her keen

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

glances indicated that she was ready for the fray. Mme. Marron, who was entirely too flashy, too prodigal with her efforts to please, wore black curls in cascades down her cheeks and joked vulgarly about her waist. This lady talked brightly and punctuated her speech with picturesque expressions and a Marseilles accent. The house, as we have already learned, was run in the name of Marron (senior); but what Mme. Marron (senior's) closest intimates knew about the husband was confined to saying that they had never known him and never heard him spoken of except by his wife who, on rare occasions, betrayed a hope of seeing him arrive there some day. It was a positive fact that the handsome mistress of the Grand Hôtel de Colchide at Poti had been long known at Tiflis under the name of Léocadie; she had been a milliner there, and the whole army of the Caucasus, infantry, cavalry, artillery, engineers, and bridge-builders (if any such exist) had submitted unresistingly to the power of her perfections.

"I well know," said Assanoff to Moreno, as he sketched these circumstances to him, "I well know that Léocadie is neither young nor pretty, but what can you expect at Poti? The devil is worse here than elsewhere, and only think, a Frenchwoman, a Frenchwoman at Poti! How can one be expected to resist?"

He introduced his fellow-officer to a very tall, vigorous, blond man with pale grey eyes, thick lips,

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

and a thoroughly jovial air. He was a Russian. This colossus was smiling; he wore an inelegant but comfortable travelling costume that showed a desire to avoid all constraint. Gregory Ivanitch Vialgue was a rich landowner, a sort of country gentleman and also a sectarian. He belonged to one of those condemned churches, always present in Christianity, that are exterminated from time to time by the recognized churches with sword and fire, but which, like patches of quitch grass, preserve a few underground runners and reappear. He was a Doukhobor, or "Enemy of the Spirit." The government and the Russian church had armed themselves against the sect to which Vialgue belonged. When they were discovered in the interior of the Empire they were not killed, as they would have been in the Middle Ages, but were seized and deported to the Caucasus.

The Enemies of the Spirit think that the healthy, good, innocent and inoffensive part of man is the flesh. The flesh in itself has not a single bad instinct or perverse tendency. To be nourished, to reproduce, to rest, these are its functions; God gave these to man and reminds him of them constantly through his appetites. As long as it is not corrupted, it purely and simply seeks ways of being satisfied; this is the way to walk in the paths of celestial justice; and the more it is satisfied the more it overflows with sanctity. What corrupts it is the Spirit. The Spirit is of



## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

diabolical origin. It is entirely useless for the development and maintenance of humanity. The Spirit alone invents passions, pretended needs, pretended duties, which right and left go against the call of the flesh and beget endless evils. The Spirit introduced into the world contradiction, controversy, ambition, and hate. From the Spirit comes murder, for the flesh lives only for self-preservation and never for destruction. The Spirit is the father of folly and hypocrisy, the exaggeration of all the sense and consequently of abuses and excesses for which people generally reproach the worthy flesh, which is easy to lead because of its innocence. That is why really religious and enlightened men must defend this poor existence by vigorously banishing the seductions of the Spirit. Hence, to avoid intolerance and persecution, let there be no more positive religion; to eliminate adultery, no more marriage; to suppress the revolt of the flesh, no constraint on any inclination; and finally, systematic abandonment of all intellectual culture, an odious occupation which ends only in the triumph of wickedness and has worked hitherto in favour of the devil.

The Enemies of the Spirit banish all the results of intelligence; they do not even respect established industry and advise reducing it to the manufacture of indispensable objects and the simplest processes. On the other hand, they greatly esteem the plough and

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

are clever agriculturists and raise fine cattle. In the Caucasus, their farms are excellent, well-run and prosperous; and if it is too classical and flowery to compare their customs with those that formerly flourished in the temples of the Syrian goddess, one can almost positively say that the Doukhobors far surpass the Mormons of America in their habits, rules, and ways of acting.

"You will never meet a more amiable man than this one," said Assanoff to his friend, as he presented the adversary of common sense; "a braver, gayer, more obliging person does not exist. I was in cantonment near his home, in the mountain regions, and what a good time I had, and how helpful he was to me, I cannot tell you and you would not believe. Well, Gregory Ivanitch, old fellow, infernal rascal, come, let me kiss you! Are you coming with us to-morrow?"

"Yes, lieutenant, I hope to. There does not seem to be any reason why I cannot leave with you to-morrow. But not as far as Baku. Don't count on that; I will stop at Shamakha."

"Vile hole, isn't it?" said Assanoff, while he and all the guests were sitting down and unfolding their napkins.

"You do not know what you are talking about," said the sectarian, shoving an enormous soup-spoon into his mouth, for Mme. Marron (senior) served

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

the guests according to their rank and a little servant had just placed a full plate before Gregory Ivanitch.

Léocadie, who knew every corner of the Caucasus, felt she ought to intervene in the conversation.

"Shut up," she cried, looking at Gregory Ivanitch most indignantly. "I know who you are and also your insinuations. But I will never permit proposals that would make a sapper blush at my table and in the respectable house of M. Marron (senior)."

Léocadie herself blushed hotly to prove that her modesty was not inferior to that of the members of the military corps whose virtue she had cited.

"Come now, jealous, come," answered Assanoff, waving his hand in a conciliatory fashion; "it seems your experience finds a trap that my ingenuousness does not suspect. So keep quiet, my promises are unshakable. Explain to Gregory Ivanitch what you are trying to make me understand, for I am naturally curious."

"It is well known," said the Doukhobor, pouring himself an enormous glass of Kakhétian wine, "that the town of Shamakha is celebrated for the distinction of its pleasures. It was formerly the residence of an independent Tartar prince. Here there was a school for dancers, admired by the whole country and celebrated as far as the Persian provinces. Naturally, crowds of people came to this delightful place to enjoy the sight of so many beauties. But Providence

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

did not ordain that the Moslems should be the sole possessors of these treasures forever. Our imperial troops attacked Shamakha, as they had the other residences of the sovereigns of the country. The resistance of the infidels was sharp, and fury took hold of them at the moment of surrender. They decided to massacre all the dancing-girls so that the Russians could not in turn be happy."

"That is one of those infamies which would finally determine me to adopt your religion if they occurred too frequently," interrupted Assanoff.

"But the massacre was not complete."

"So much the better."

"The Russian regiments captured the place by assault, at the moment the butchery was beginning. It was a frightful sight; the yawning breach gave passage to crowds of soldiers; they tried to kill all the defenders of the city who were so enraged they did not fall back an inch. To their great astonishment, the besiegers found the bodies of young girls richly dressed in blue and red gauze, spangled with gold and silver, covered with jewels, lying in their blood, thrown on the street. Going further into the town they saw groups of these victims still alive; the Moslems were striking them with their swords. Then our men threw themselves more boldly into the fray, and that is how, when all resistance was over, it was found that about one-fourth of these adorable crea-

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

tures, who had raised the glory of Shamakha to the heavens, had been saved."

"If your story had not had an almost happy ending," cried Assanoff, "I could not have finished my dinner. But as you have told it this way, I will go on as far as the dessert. Madame, will you be kind enough to have some champagne brought to me?"

The bustle following this request interrupted the conversation for a moment, but when they had drunk the health of the new officer who had just come to the Caucasus, which Mme. Marron, senior, proposed so amiably that the gay engineer might have been disturbed if his nature could have been affected by such trifles, one of the guests continued the thread of the story.

"A few months ago when I went to Shamakha, the most highly regarded dancer was Omm-Djehane. She was turning everybody's head."

"Omm-Djehane," said the Enemy of the Spirit, sharply, "is a pitiable little girl, full of caprices and nonsense. She dances badly; if they speak of her it is solely because of her unamiable manners and naughty whims."

"It appears," cried Assanoff, "that we have no reason to be pleased with this young woman."

"As you seem to understand it," answered the first speaker, "Omm-Djehane is truly not worthy of attention. I once came across a retired infantry officer who

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

had known her since childhood. This beauty originally came from a Lesghi tribe that is now destroyed, and you know that her compatriots have no great reputation for gentleness. She was taken from the midst of a burning mountain village, from the body of her mother, fallen dead over the body of an officer, who had been stabbed. The lady, the general's wife, claimed her and promised to bring her up like a European. They took very good care of her and dressed her well, exactly like the two daughters of the house. She was taught by the same teachers as these young ladies, and she learned Russian, German and French quickly and better than they did. But one of her favourite games was to plunge kittens into boiling water. When she was ten she almost strangled her governess, the worthy Mlle. Martinet, at the turn of the stairs, because the latter had called her 'little fool' a week before, and she ruined forever her magnificent twist of chestnut hair. Six months later she went one better. She remembered, or rather she had never forgotten, that the younger daughter of her benefactress had pushed her in playing, that she had fallen and bruised her forehead. She thought it her duty to consider and efface this outrage and struck and split open the cheek of her little companion with a well-aimed thrust of the penknife; fortunately, that was all, for she had intended to put her eye out. The general's wife had enough with this last stroke,



## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

and she thrust the young rebel from her heart and home and entrusted her, with a small sum, to a Moslem woman.

“At fourteen, Omm-Djehane fled from Derbend, where her new adoptive mother lived. They do not know what became of her for the next two years. To-day, she is one of the dancing-girls of the troupe, instructed, guided and governed by Mme. Forough-el-Husnet, otherwise called ‘The Splendours of Beauty.’ Moreover, Gregory Ivanitch is right. Many have tried to seduce Omm-Djehane, but no one has succeeded.”

Assanoff thought this story so marvellous that he wanted to share his enthusiasm with Moreno. But the effort was useless. The Spaniard was not at all interested in what he considered the pranks of a girl of no account. Finding him silent, the engineer thought him sulky and did not bother about him any more, especially as his own imagination, which was heated by the champagne, was increasing in ardour.

After dinner, the Frenchman and the Hungarian went to their rooms. Moreno went, too; and Assanoff played a game called “preference” with two of Mme. Marron, senior’s, other guests, while the Enemy of the Spirit watched them with eyes growing steadily dimmer as he sipped his brandy. These varied pleasures lasted until the players were startled by a dull thud beside them. It was Gregory Ivanitch who had col-



## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

lapsed in his chair. Assanoff had lost money. It had just struck two o'clock in the morning. All went to bed and the Grand Hôtel de Colchide, run by M. Marron, senior, settled down to slumber.

Promptly at five o'clock, a servant knocked at the door of Moreno's room to notify him that it would soon be time to depart. A few moments later, Assanoff appeared in the hall. His military greatcoat was loosely slung over his shoulders, his red silk shirt was mussed and not properly fastened around his neck, and his white cap was slapped on his thick, curly hair, not tidied by any brush or comb. As for his face, it was ravaged, pale and drawn, and his eyes were red. The engineer greeted Don Juan with a terrible yawn and stretched out his arms.

"Well, dear friend," he cried, "we have to start. Do you like to get up so early when you are not on duty, or even when you are? Here, George, you dog, fetch us a bottle of champagne to start us off, or by the devil I'll break your bones."

"No, no champagne," said Moreno. "Come along. You forget how yesterday they impressed upon us the importance of an early start, with the long way ahead of us."

"Certainly, certainly I remember, but I am a gentleman above everything; a man like me owes it to himself to crown his day properly."

"Let us set off like sensible people."

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

He persuaded the engineer, and singing the Strawberry-song that was then very popular in the Caucasus, they proceeded towards the bank of the river which they were to mount. Their conveyance was most simple and not at all in harmony with the Tartar officer's claims to refinement. There was only a long, narrow wherry and four boatmen at their disposal. These, in their own interest, made less use of their oars than of a long rope to which two of them were yoked and walked along the bank like horses on a tow-path, pulling the boat. The staff of the *Argo*, when that ship visited this country under the command of Captain Jason, would have thought this yoking primitive. It is not as if there was no steamer-service, written up by the newspapers of Europe and America; but sometimes, for one reason or another, this service was not in operation. In short, Moreno and Assanoff, wishing to go to Koutais and from there to Tiflis and Baku, had no choice but to take a seat in their pirogue, and this they did.

They were a fine sight, seated or lying down in this narrow craft, shaded from the sun's rays by a white awning, in the midst of their luggage, smoking, talking, sleeping or silent, advancing with majestic slowness, while two of the boatmen pushed with boat-hooks and two others, with the rope over their shoulders, pulled their hardest, walking, bent over, with measured steps, along the bank.

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

It cannot be said that the forest only begins outside of Poti. Poti is swallowed up by the forest; and when one has left behind the square stone enclosure, flanked by towers, where the Moslems formerly penned their slaves, of which commodity this was the principal mart in the Caucasus, there are no more houses and one can imagine oneself in a place never visited by human beings. Nothing could be more abandoned, inhospitable, fierce and unfriendly looking. The stream was turbid, tumbling muddy water, or full of sand; the bed was rocky against which the water constantly beat; the lacerated shores, washed down by the sudden and pitiless winter floods, showed a barren beach or a sudden slope; the trunks of drifting trees lifted their mutilated arms as if imploring mercy, then rolled over each other in threes and fours, half buried but always shivering, always moving in vain, and as the angry stream passed over them, groaned harder through their branches; and, on either side of this fury, was the solemn silence of the seemingly limitless forest. This is the scene: the stream groans, roars, jumps, eddies, and runs; the officers' boat slowly ascends, to the rhythmic hauling of the two men; the leaves of the forest, large and small, quiver in the morning breeze, in the shade, in the light; through distant glades, the rays of the sun glisten on the verdure and form bands of light, like elves; the delicate tops of ash, beech and

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

oaks, taller than their fellows, are silhouetted against the clear blue sky.

Moreno was gazing at this truly marvellous spectacle with a strange interest when Assanoff, slightly revived and almost himself again, proposed jumping on the bank and lightening the boat in order to have the pleasure of a walk. The Spanish officer accepted this idea with alacrity and the two companions began to walk in the high grass, outdistancing their boat and, sure of catching up with it, occasionally venturing out into some clearings. Then Moreno saw that the forest country crossed by the Rion was not so deserted as his first impression had led him to believe. Now and again he and his companion saw frightened bands of little pigs run rapidly out of the thickets, very like young wild boars with their long hard bristles and their thin, rough, nimble, agile legs, so pretty that all their European relatives would have disowned them. These small, strange-looking creatures fled in all haste through the thicket, attracting attention to some square log cabin hidden under the trees, sending the blue smoke from its hearth towards the sky, and always inhabited, one must admit, by men, women and children as liberally endowed with beauty as with the rags of poverty. Ever since mankind has existed, it has been known that the inhabitants of the Phase Valley were beautiful. People demonstrated what they thought of them by abducting them and

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

selling them, adoring them, massacring them, because man in the mass or alone has not been endowed with any other way of showing his love. After all, this beauty is certainly not fatal, since so many famous and powerful queens, so many highest favourites and royal offspring have come from these forests of the Phase and these wretched hovels. Destiny has asked nothing of these men and women, no genius, talent, or splendid family; for their beauty alone she has been contented to seat them on the throne or place the throne under their feet. Sometimes history exaggerates, and for one pretty girl met by chance and making a favourable impression on a passer-by, which he spreads through a whole province, how many red-haired hostesses have imposed, through the grace of the same judge, their failings on all the hostesses of a kingdom! But nothing like this happened here. Nature really surpassed herself and the imagination could not outdistance her. All that has been said, written, and sung about the physical perfection of the people of the Phase is true to the last dot, and the most tedious examination, if truthful, finds nothing to retract. What is especially remarkable and contrary to all rules is that these peasant men and women, these wretched creatures, are gifted with extreme grace and distinction; their hands are charming, their feet adorable, their forms, their joints, all are per-

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

fect, and one can imagine how poised is the walk of these faultlessly built creatures.

Assanoff was too accustomed to the sight of these Imerithian and Gurielles girls to be as much struck by them as Moreno. He thought them pretty, but he was all for civilization and considered Mme. Marron, senior, endowed with very superior perfections, although a bit worn by the passing of years.

Perhaps you noticed that the Enemy of the Spirit did not take passage with the two officers, although, according to his declarations of the day before, he might have been expected to do so. Assanoff was so little master of himself, at his departure, that he did not inquire about his friend's absence; he only thought of it after the boat had gone quite far. Moreno had not participated in the conversation of the previous day, so that Gregory Ivanitch was perfectly free to do as he pleased. Night had brought him counsel. He had ruminated a little in his drunkenness (he was never so prudent and wary as when he was a little tipsy) upon the folly of arriving at Shamakha with a rattle-head concerned with his own pleasures, and not at all with being agreeable to him. Gregory Ivanitch did not deceive himself in thinking that, because of the many pleasurable opportunities which his religious principles and good character had put in the engineer's way, the latter would take the trouble



## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

to be generous or have any scruples, for once in his life, against following in his footsteps and causing him unpleasantness. On the contrary, he was absolutely convinced that nothing would be more agreeable to the civilized Tartar than a conflict which would undoubtedly result in a collection of good and bad jokes, jeers and boasts with which to amuse all the garrisons and cantonments of the Caucasus for a whole year.

Consequently, he had gone back on his promise and resolved to travel alone and quickly, and a few hours after the troops departed, he, in turn, had taken a boat and arranged to keep a slight distance between him and those who preceded him. When night fell, instead of spending it with his two friends in a log hut belonging to the State and reserved for the use of travellers, he doubled the relay of his boatmen and reached Koutais in the morning, took the post-stage, crossed to Tiflis without stopping and reached Shamakha.

Shamakha is not a big city; it is not even interesting. The original old town has almost entirely disappeared, to make way for a pile of modern structures, probably well built, but entirely lacking in character. The rich Moslems built themselves Russian houses suitable to their needs and habits; here as everywhere are the government warehouses, the barracks, and a church. The chief of police here was a



## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

former cavalry officer, an honest man who raised song-birds and passed most of his days in an enormous cage where he lodged his pensioners. He and the governor were the best-housed men in the country. His own dwelling was more like that of a German bourgeois. Gregory Ivanitch Vialgue went there first, knocked at the door, and was admitted.

He entered the parlour with his usual easy manner and without bowing to the holy image placed in a high niche in a corner.

"My excellent friend," he said, "I have made a long voyage. I have come from Constantinople and lastly from Poti. I have not had an hour's rest and I bring you Dame Fortune."

"She is welcome," answered Paul Petrovitch, "certainly welcome; she is a good woman, well on in years and capricious, but no one in the world, I think, ever knowingly closes his door to her."

"In short, I succeeded beyond all expectation in our affairs."

"Tell it all in detail," answered Paul Petrovitch with an air of beatitude, spreading out his blue, red-striped cotton handkerchief on his knees and taking a big portion of snuff up his nose.

"Here is the story. As agreed, after leaving you two months ago, I went to Redout-Kalé, where I saw the Armenian whom I had arranged to meet there. He explained the situation to me. He and his asso-

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

ciates bought six little girls and four little boys, cheaply, I declare. He estimates that of the ten children, who are all promising, at least four will be exceptionally beautiful, and one, a little girl, whom he really got for a crust of bread, ought to attain an unheard-of perfection."

"You warm my heart, my dear soul," cried Paul Petrovitch.

"The Armenian told me that since he satisfactorily sold what was best and ready last year, he had resolved to perfect his merchandise again this time."

"He is an intelligent man; I always said it and believed it," muttered Paul Petrovitch.

"With that object," continued Gregory, "he acquired a pretty country-house, where he lives with four daughters, his two nieces, a nephew and a cousin of his wife's, ten in all. You follow the details?"

"Perfectly!"

"For all these little people he has procured passports, papers, everything according to regulations, in short, all that is needed. I saw the expenses on the books, and, frankly, it did not cost much."

"I am almost annoyed," said the chief of police. "That is what I call discrediting authority when those invested with it grant privileges too easily. But perhaps my principles are too strict. Continue."

"The Armenian engaged a teacher of Russian, a teacher of French, who at the same time teaches

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

geography, and a Swiss governess. The costs of the establishment are not ruinous and the result of the speculation will be to enable our company, from now on, to provide wives and capable stewards for all the Turks brought up in Europe who like to have a suitable home, and also people belonging to other religions who appreciate beauty and talent."

"That Armenian is assuredly a genius," murmured Paul Petrovitch, raising his eyes to heaven and crossing his hands on his stomach.

"Our American partner said almost the same thing at Constantinople, when we divided the profits of last year. But undoubtedly, as things are going to-day, the unlimited extension of our business will raise our profits beyond our expectations."

"I think so too, my good, my perfect friend, and what is more—for I do not think only of my own property, I also consider the welfare of my fellow-creatures; I am a philanthropist first of all—see what we are doing!"

"That is clear," answered Gregory Ivanitch, with a superior grimace. "We buy poor little urchins who are condemned to vegetate and starve here in the mire, for about a hundred rubles apiece; we make them sweet, gentle, amiable, sociable, and they become great ladies and gentlemen or at least worthy bourgeois or good servants. I would like to know who can boast of being more useful in the world than we

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

are. But it is not to theorize that I came to see you. Here are your dividends."

At this Gregory drew from the pocket of his frock-coat a flat pocket-book and from this a bundle of bills, and for a good half hour the two friends were plunged into computations which caused Paul Petrovitch great satisfaction. When all this jumble came to an end, the dignified chief of police called loudly for brandy; and while the glasses were being filled, emptied and filled again, the Enemy of the Spirit said to his comrade: "The next will be better. This year we have only cast-offs, thanks to that fool of a Léocadie Marron who bought three girls with spoiled figures. If our excellent mistress of the dance, Forough-el-Husnet, wanted to help us, she could do so, and her assistance would be very timely."

"My little father, you must not deceive me. You would like to sell the Splendours of Beauty herself. But you are wrong, she would not consent, nor would I."

"What put that bizarre idea in your head, Paul Petrovitch? The Splendours of Beauty could have been disposed of profitably if she had lived, and we too, fifty years ago, when tastes were different from ours. That woman must weigh— What doesn't she weigh? Nowadays, they want only thin women; they call this looking distinguished. I am sure the Splendours of Beauty would not fetch two hundred ducats,

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

and she would want to keep at least half of that, if not more. That would not be business-like. No, don't be absurd. I have not thought of the Splendours of Beauty for one instant. Of Omm-Djehane I cannot say the same. She is not pretty, but she speaks French and Russian. I would have to give her quite a big remittance; but as we have had no expenses of education, nourishment or maintenance, it would come out all right. At Poti, I just met a Frenchman, a merchant of grained wood, who assured me he knew an old retired Kaimakam at Trebizond who was looking for a well-brought-up wife; he wants a Moslem in order to dispense with the bother of conversation. It seems to me that Omm-Djehane would suit these requirements perfectly."

"If she consents Omm-Djehane will be a handful for your Kaimakam," answered the chief of police, sententiously. "Speak to the Splendours of Beauty about it. You will hear her opinion."

Whereupon the partners separated; but here a remark is in place. It would be wrong to consider the Enemy of the Spirit a disciple of the villain of the melodrama, or even as a slightly bad man. He was neither one nor the other. As for his morality, he had the ideas of his co-religionists; this was not his fault, for he was brought up by them, with them and like them; one might almost say that he was innocent, since he saw no wrong in what he thought was good

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

sense and truth. His was a crooked and misguided mind, but not that of a rogue, in the proper sense of the word; and as for his business, he conducted it with as justifiably peaceful a conscience as that of the managers of a matrimonial agency at Paris, after forty years of success. The European laws strictly forbid traffic in slaves. This is correct; and, according to this, the Russian chief of police, the Armenian merchant, the American investor and the French travelling salesman, all Christians, were purely and simply scamps. But the Enemy of the Spirit and his Asiatic clients had reason for a peaceful conscience in a country where marriages are never contracted, even according to the strictest religious rules, except through the sale of the women, sometimes merely feigned, and where the man-slave ranks immediately after the children in the family and ahead of the servants. This is not said to praise Gregory Ivanitch, but merely to show him as he is. One can say with justice that he was a good soul, dogmatically freed from all scruples in the pursuit of his pleasures and other people's, naturally obliging and wishing no one in the world ill, except of course the Spirit, the cause of all woes here below. He held to this point.

After leaving the chief of police he visited the Splendours of Beauty and found this lady's health as good as when he had left her at their last interview.



## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

She was in a room built somewhat according to European style, but furnished and arranged like the Tartars. On the whitewashed walls hung coloured engravings of the story of Cora and Alonzo in gilded frames, and a lithographed portrait of Marshal Baskevitch, ornamented with frightful moustaches and represented, through a really ingenious idea of the artist, as looking towards Erivan with one eye and Warsaw with the other. But these were the only things borrowed from an exotic luxury. The rug thrown on the floor was Persian, and, extending along the wall, were small, narrow mattresses, forming divans, covered with native stuffs. The Splendours of Beauty had a face like a full moon, eyes like two black diamonds, a little dimmed, a mouth like a pomegranate and an opulence of flesh all over her body that would have thrown a true Osmanli into ecstasies. She was settled in the midst of a pile of cushions and methodically smoked her *tchibuk*, which she held in her right hand, while the left was idly resting on the mattress, twisting the beads of her *tesbih*, or Moslem chaplet. In short, she was conscientiously following her daily occupation of doing nothing.

It would be rash to pretend that she was thinking of nothing. This celestial state exists for men only in many countries, but it is doubtful whether women

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

can attain it. The chief dancer was probably thinking of something. Seeing Gregory Ivanitch, she said to him, almost vivaciously:

"Selam Aleikum! You are welcome!"

"Aleyk-ous-Selam! Madame," answered the Enemy of the Spirit, "my eyes shine with happiness at seeing you."

"Bismillah! Sit down, I beg you!"

She clapped her hands. A very dirty maid-servant appeared.

"Bring a bottle of *raki* here and two glasses."

Gregory sat down, with the drink between himself and the mistress of the house. After two or three bracers, the speakers were in a comfortable state and began the conversation.

"Madame," said the Enemy of the Spirit, "I have just proposed to Paul Petrovitch a very good opportunity for Omm-Djehane's happiness."

"If you are going to make her good fortune," answered the Splendours of Beauty, "she may be grateful, but I must know what you mean by that."

Gregory Ivanitch waved his hand in the air and shook his head with disinterested magnanimity.

"Bah!" he said. "I know what's what. If I counted for anything in the business, she would not appear any more touched to-day than she was three months ago; but she won't hear of her servant, and her servant is not disposed to give himself a stomach-

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

ache for the sake of some one who despises him. Stupidities like that are for slaves of the Spirit. No! Leave me out. I come simply to propose to Omm-Djehane to marry her to the Kaimakam. To tell you the whole story, I took along her photograph, the other day, a copy of the one the general's wife had made eight years ago. I showed it to the worthy of whom I am speaking and, actually, he took fire. He is a worthy man, I repeat. He is only seventy; a strict Moslem. He does not drink wine or *raki*—that will please Omm-Djehane who strongly detests what is good. He has a pronounced horror of Europeans which will also suit her, for her sentiments on that point are no mystery. Finally, he is rich. I know he has property in three villages near Batum, and, in addition, a nice income from silver mines at Gumush-Khaneh. See what you can do."

"I love Omm-Djehane tenderly," answered the Splendours of Beauty. "She is my adopted daughter. My heart bleeds already as I hear you speak. What will happen when I have to separate myself from this child? I will die a thousand deaths; they will bury me; let them bury me now. This deserves consideration. How much will I get for consenting to such a sacrifice?"

Gregory Ivanitch stroked his chin.

"It really is a matter of some consequence. Omm-Djehane will receive a third of what the Kaimakam

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

gives; I will get the second third for being the promoter of this happy union, and you will share the last third with our good and dear friend, the chief of police. The buyer offers two thousand rubles."

"Two thousand rubles?" answered the chief dancer, with an air of consternation. "Do you consider that? How can you listen to such a proposition without bursting out laughing? A girl who is a pearl of virtue and innocence and who only dances for the most respectable people, such as generals and colonels; at most, once or twice, before majors. A girl who speaks Russian and French like those who invented them and who can read and write and knows geography. A girl who—"

Gregory Ivanitch put his hand over her mouth with gentle familiarity and continued the long-winded story himself:

"A girl who is charming, but very thin; with quite pretty eyes, but blue; not tender as a rule; a girl who knows many fine things, I admit, but who also wields a knife most adroitly, as my own shoulder proves, and who unfortunately is not always in an affable mood; a girl finally who is a devil incarnate. For my part, I think that to pay two thousand rubles for one's own misfortune is extremely dear."

"But a sixth of that sum is nothing at all for me."

"You mean a third."

"How? If I am to divide with Paul Petrovitch?"

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

“You will take the whole from him, in addition to what you have already taken. Don’t you know that when he has been drinking he weeps on my bosom over the penury to which you have reduced him? ‘Gregory Ivanitch,’ he says, ‘this woman is so beautiful, amiable, smiling, that she will bury me in the same costume I wore when I was born.’ And then he sheds floods of tears. I have to dry his face and put him to bed myself. Don’t talk nonsense to me. You will get a third for yourself. Take it or leave it!”

“Very well, Gregory Ivanitch, you are a true father to me. I am wearing myself out repeating it. Often when I am all alone I exclaim: Splendours of Beauty, remember Gregory Ivanitch is your father! Tell Paul Petrovitch to give me a gold watch with enamelled flowers on it like the one belonging to the wife of the governor of the province, and I will speak to Omm-Djehane.”

“I don’t mix in these affairs. You may get what you like out of Paul Petrovitch and you do not need an intermediary. Besides, time is pressing. Will you or will you not begin our affair to-day?”

The Splendours of Beauty shook her head from right to left with an expression of consent.

“One can refuse you nothing, Gregory Ivanitch. Vallah! Billah! Tallah! I will get to work at once. But only give me that little turquoise ring you are

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

wearing on your left hand as a remembrance of your kindness. Turquoises are a token of happiness."

The Enemy of the Spirit gallantly took the ring from his finger and presented it to the lady. She first placed it on her forehead, then drew a cashmere purse from her bosom and slipped her new conquest in with the older ones. This done, Gregory Ivanitch took leave, and then the Splendours of Beauty lifted her opulent mass with an effort, rose to her feet and, swaying her hips, a motion which daily drove countless admirers into ecstasy, left the room, her *tchibuk* in one hand and the rosary in the other. Without stopping, she passed before the doors of the cells inhabited by several of her pupils and finally opened that of Omm-Djehane. She entered.

The apartment was small and narrow. There was only a very short sofa in a corner. No European pictures; no luxury whatever anywhere, no *tchibuk*—Omm-Djehane did not smoke—no glass, no bottle—she did not drink—no, nothing, not even a pot of rouge or white lead. For she did not make up—most extraordinary for a city person, and those who liked her the best cited this singularity as one of the most regrettable traits of her character.

When the mistress entered, the young dancer was seated, her cheek supported by her left hand, her elbow on a cushion. She was looking straight before her, blank to thought and feeling. She wore a narrow



## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

dress of crimson silk with yellow stripes and blue flowers on it; a red, gold-embroidered gauze handkerchief was twisted in her black hair. A gold-enamelled necklace was around her neck, and in her ears and around her arms were ornaments of gold.

Gregory Ivanitch was right. Omm-Djehane was not what is called pretty. It was easy to see, however, why he had been touched and troubled. Seductiveness emanated from her whole being. One cannot explain the reason for this, but one is affected by it just the same. She was one of those creatures who allure, intoxicate, bewitch, and cannot tell you how or why. A cold critic would have found only one adjective to apply to her. He would have said: "She is strange." But no critic would have been able to remain cold in her presence.

"My soul," said the Splendours of Beauty, sitting beside her pupil, "listen well to me. A great mystery is on foot."

Then, seeing Omm-Djehane's eyes fastened upon her, she told her from start to finish the conversation she had just had with Gregory Ivanitch.

The many oratorical precautions she used, the alluring phrases interpolated into her story, the honeyed and caressing voice, her reticences, her many promises, showed that the chief dancer did not expect to convert the young Lesghi easily. So she was agreeably surprised when, after a few short moments of

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

thought, the latter unexpectedly gave an encouraging answer.

"How can I be sure that this Gregory Ivanitch and the others are not offering me a snare?"

"Then you are inclined, flower of my soul, to accept the Kaimakam as a husband?"

"At once, but I do not wish to be deceived."

She said these words roughly; her eyes, which were not naturally prominent, but somewhat tragically sunken under a protruding forehead, seemed to bury themselves deeper, and her whole expression was so eloquent that the Splendours of Beauty answered with conviction:

"And how could you imagine any one would dare to play with you? I think it would be a very difficult thing to do."

Omm-Djehane did not answer. She looked at the floor and fell into a reverie. Her mistress, impressed with this marvellous docility, put her arm around her neck and was going to kiss her, when the dirty maid-servant entered.

"Madame," she said, "his lordship, the chief of police, sends to tell you that you must come to the governor's this evening with Djemileh and Talhemeh to dance."

"Is there to be a reception?"

"There are foreign guests."

"Officers?"

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

"Officers. His servant told me this, but there will also be Moslems. . . . Aga-Khan and Shems-Eddyn-Bey."

"Do you know whether Gregory Ivanitch will be there?"

"I do not know, but his lordship, the chief of police, says you must wear your best clothes; you will receive fine presents."

The little scullion went out.

"Fine presents, fine presents! That is easily said," murmured the Splendours of Beauty. "They never fail to promise this every time, and if I believed it I would die of hunger. But after all, we'll go, that is certain. How could I help it? As for you, my eyes, as you are as good as married to a Kaimakam, you do not have to amuse these dogs and you can stay here if it suits you."

"It does not suit me at all. On the contrary, I will go with you and the others to the governor's. Look! I just did the Istikhareh three times in succession, while you were talking to Dourr-al-Zeman"—the Jewel of Time was the real name of the young slattern—"and I had the same number of beads three times."

She showed her rosary, which she held tightly in her two hands; she mumbled the end of a prayer between her teeth and got up. The Splendours of Beauty had nothing to answer to so strong an argument as

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

the decision of the Istikhareh; and, as she had exerted herself more than usual, she returned to her room to sleep until it was time to dress, leaving Omm-Djehane to think, if she liked, of the new adventure upon which her agitated life was to embark.

It was quite true that the Governor of Shamakha intended to spend some money. He was entertaining at dinner the two officers who were travelling to Baku, Lieutenant Assanoff and the standard-bearer Moreno, and for this occasion he had invited the officers of the infantry battalion, who were garrisoned in the city, and the friend of his heart, the chief of police.

Assanoff and Don Juan, though they had arrived after the Enemy of the Spirit, were tired and bored from the journey, but all the happier for being so near the end, as Shamakha is not far from Baku. They had spent only a few hours at Tiflis. The commander had told them to join their respective corps without delay as there was to be a serious movement of troops in Daghestan. This was consoling for Moreno. As he was getting farther away from Spain and the wife he loved, his first discouragement was changing to an unhealthy resignation, which destroyed all that made life worth while. He felt that his past life was finished and he had no desire to begin a new one.

Herodotus tells how, long ago, in Egypt, the army

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

was discontented with the way the sovereign acted, and the men of the warrior caste took their arms, formed bands and went to the frontier. The servants of the abandoned monarch ran after them at his command and said to them, "What are you doing? You are deserting your families. You are light-heartedly losing your houses and all your goods!" They proudly answered: "Goods? With our fists we will try to conquer better ones. Houses! They can be built. Wives! They exist everywhere, and from those we find we shall have other sons." With this reply they went away, and nothing could stop them.

Moreno was not one of those rough wielders of weapons, who are no longer to be found nowadays. To-day, either as a result of custom or from a refined and enfeebled imagination and heart, there are few men whose happiness and vital strength does not exist outside of themselves, in another being or object. Almost every one resembles the embryo; he receives life from the heart of a life that is not his own; and if, unfortunately, he is separated from this, it is doubtful if not impossible for him to go on. Besides, all Don Juan saw of the place to which he was transplanted seemed like a dream, one of those confused dreams one cannot explain. Assanoff, in his way, had explained what was going on around them, but since everything was natural to the engineer, he passed lightly over matters that were most deserving

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

of comment, and, besides, he could not concentrate and did not know how to reason or explain. However, Moreno stayed with him. The flagrant drunkenness of Assanoff repulsed him; his gaiety attracted him. Assanoff's mind was disorderly, but he had wit; generally he rambled, but at times he was good-hearted. During the interminable tête-à-tête on the long trip he told Moreno a great deal, and Moreno on his side confided in him. Assanoff was touched by the exile's misfortune and was almost as tender as a woman to her lover. Sometimes, in speaking of himself, he admitted he was a fairly rough diamond and only very slightly polished, but he soon took this back and proclaimed himself a gentleman. In short, he gloried in Moreno's superior intelligence and character.

In the stories of the Crusades there is always a generous Emir, a brave Bedouin or faithful slave, linking his faith with the Christian knight's. After having renounced everything for his master, the subordinate willingly lets himself be killed for his superior. A similar idea is also current amongst the Occidentals and is found in the novels of Cervantes and Walter Scott, who has perpetuated it in the two Saracen servants of the Knight Templar Brian de Bois Guilbert. This fiction has a foundation of truth. The heart and imagination, the sole springs of devotion, hold a very great place in the make-up of the



## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

Asiatic; capable of loving much, these people have often sacrificed themselves for those whom they loved. So, as soon as Assanoff found Don Juan sympathetic to him, he loved him wholly and without restraint.

The governor's dinner was like all parties of this kind. There was a lot of drinking. Assanoff—God forbid that he should miss the chance—was in such spirits that he would have surpassed himself if Don Juan's presence had not restrained him a little. So he went no further than the stage of a red face, a slightly staggering walk and a more disconnected conversation than ever. He stopped at this limit so as not to annoy Moreno. After leaving the table they went to the parlour and smoked. In half an hour, two striking personages of the native population came in to join the officers, most of whom were in a more advanced state than Assanoff. Aga-Khan and Shems-Eddyn-Bey greeted all the audience with dignity and courtesy, without seeming to notice anything unusual. They sat down after having refused pipes, saying they did not smoke. Self-control in everything and sobriety, which was then the fashion, in a spirit of contrast, was enjoined upon all Moslems of the Caucasus. Soon the dancers were announced. The governor gave orders to bring them in. They appeared.

The Splendours of Beauty came first; then Omm-Djehane, followed by Djemileh and Talhemeh, two

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

very agreeable damsels, as made up as their mistress, all costumed in long dresses with many folds falling straight to the feet. Gold and silver gleamed in the silk and gauze of their magnificent and fantastically sumptuous garments. The many necklaces, long dangling earrings, numerous bracelets, gold and jewels all glittered and tinkled at each move of these beautiful persons. But everybody instinctively looked at Omm-Djehane, either because of the absence of make-up, or the austerity of her attire, or (and this was surely the true reason) because of her all-conquering charm. Once they looked at her, they could not take their eyes away from her. Her glance, cold, indifferent, almost insolent, almost irritating, passed over each one, and this was no small part of her allurements. Although her eyes were not so beautiful as Djemileh's, her waist not so round as Talhemeh's, and she could in no way rival the exuberant perfection of the Splendours of Beauty, this queen, confident of her triumph, troubled every one, and it required an effort to escape from her magic.

No fashionable singer or famous comedienne ever made her entry into a European parlour with more dignity than these dancing-girls or was received with more respect. They greeted no one but the two Moslem dignitaries whose presence all acknowledged, except Omm-Djehane; to these they gave a most flattering glance to which the latter responded with a

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

discreet smile, stroking their beards with an air that would have honoured the Duc de Richelieu. This done, the ladies sat down close to each other in a corner of the room on a rug, with an air as entirely disengaged as that of persons who were there to do embroidering.

Meanwhile, behind them, four men appeared to whom no one paid the least attention. They squatted in the corner of the room, opposite the one occupied by the dancers; they were the musicians. One held a light guitar, called *tar*; another a kind of rebeck, a violin with a long neck; a third had a *rebab*, another stringed instrument; a fourth, a tambourine, indispensable to all Asiatic music in which the rhythm is very much accented.

Unanimously the company asked for the dance to begin. The governor and the chief of police were the special interpreters of the general sentiment to the Splendours of Beauty, and she, after allowing herself to be urged the required length of time for an artist conscious of her worth, and having shown her modesty by an amiable embarrassment, rose to her feet, advanced slowly to the middle of the room and nodded almost imperceptibly to the musicians, whose instruments all started in together. Each guest had drawn his chair back against the wall to leave a wide space entirely free.

Then, to a very slow, monotonous tune, accom-

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

panied by the tambourine, jingling with a jerky, muffled, nervous noise, the dancer, without moving from the spot, placed her hands on her hips and made a few motions with the head and upper part of the body. She turned slowly around. She did not look at any one. She was impassive and oblivious of all but herself. They watched her attentively and waited for an action that did not come, and precisely because of the baffled waiting they became more intense. The effect produced by this kind of emotion can best be compared to that experienced on the seashore, when the eye constantly asks the wave to do more, to mount higher, to go farther, than the preceding wave, and one listens to its roar in the forever disappointed hope that the noise to come will be a little bit louder; and yet one stays there, seated on the shore; hours pass, and it is difficult to tear oneself away. This is the way the motions of the dancing-girls of Asia affect the senses. There is no variety or vivacity, and seldom is there a variation through any sudden movement, but the rhythmic wheeling exhales a delightful torpor upon the soul, like an almost hypnotic intoxication.

The strong dancer moved slowly on the floor, partly extending her rounded arms; she did not walk, she slid with an imperceptible vibration; she advanced towards the spectators slowly, passing close to each one, giving him a sort of shiver, letting him think,

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

perhaps hope, that she would accord him a mark of her regard. She did nothing of the kind. Only when she was in front of the two Moslems did she permit them to surmise a new sign of her deference and partiality by doubling the length of the very short stop with which she flattered the others. This was keenly felt and applauded, for, in this discreet dance, the slightest shading stands out clearly. When the music stopped the enthusiastic spectators broke into applause. Moreno, alone, was left cold. One does not appreciate these things at first sight, and in all countries the enjoyment of the national diversions demands experience and initiation. It was not so with Assanoff; his exultation expressed itself in an entirely unexpected fashion.

"Good God!" said he. "I am a civilized man and have been to the cadet school at St. Petersburg, but may the devil take me if in all Europe there is anything to equal what we have just seen. I call for some one here to dance the Lesghi with me. Isn't there a drop of blood in the veins of any one? Are you all stupefied or all Russians?"

A Tartar officer of the infantry rose and took Assanoff by the hand.

"Come," said the infantryman proudly. "Murad, son of Hassan-Bey, if you are a son of your father show what you know!"

The engineer answered with a look the like of

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

which Moreno had never seen. It was harsh, savage, and full of fire, and in their army greatcoats the two Tartars began to dance the Lesghi. The music vigorously attacked the barbarous melody peculiar to this step. There was nothing languorous or melancholy about this. Murad, son of Hassan, was no longer drunk; he seemed the princely son of a prince. He might have been a soldier of the ancient Mongol Kubla Khan; the tambourine sounded palpitating with ardour in a transport of cruelty and conquest. The audience, all except the Spaniard, were overcome by wine and brandy and had not heard what Assanoff had said and no one understood the emotions that stirred him. All they observed in this strange scene was that the engineer was dancing the Lesghi marvellously: this drama, which portrays battle, murder, blood and, at the end, revolt, was being played before these conquerors who never dreamed of understanding it and still less had any fear of its meaning. Don Juan alone was dumbfounded at the new expression on Assanoff's face, and when the dance was over, in the midst of the joyous stamping of all the Russian officers, and while the attention of all was distracted by many servants entering the room, bringing new pipes, tea, and vodka, he drew his friend into a corner, which happened to be the one where the dancers had all been standing during the Lesghi, and said to him in a low tone:



## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

"Are you mad? What is the comedy you have just been playing? Why make a spectacle of yourself? If you love your country, can't you show it in some different way than by convulsions?"

"Keep still," Assanoff answered roughly; "you 'don't know what you are talking about! There are things you cannot understand. Most certainly I am a coward, a wretch, and the worst of men, and that infamous scamp of a Djemiloff who just danced with me is no less debased, although he danced like a man, but you see there are still moments when, low as one's heart is, one feels uplifted, and the day is not yet when a Tartar sees the girls of his country dance without tears of blood gathering under his eyelids."

Perhaps tears of blood had formed where Assanoff said they did, but how could one know it? What was certain was that real big tears ran down his cheeks. He dried them quickly with one hand before they could be noticed, when he felt his other one taken. He turned quickly and saw Omm-Djehane. She said to him rapidly in French:

"To-night, two hours before the *desteh*, at my door. Do not knock."

She turned aside at once. As for him, the words of the beautiful woman, who, until now, was supposed to be entirely insensible and invincible, who was the glory of all the dancing-girls of the town because she showed her talents very seldom, this charming speech

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

brought him back suddenly to the civilization which he seemed to have completely forgotten for several minutes. Passing his arm through Moreno's, he drew the Spanish officer aside and whispered in his ear:

"Bless me! I am a lucky rascal! I have a rendezvous."

"With whom?"

"The flower of the flock! I will tell you all to-morrow. But, look here, I must not drink any more."

"No, I think you have lost your head sufficiently as it is to-night."

"The head! the heart! the senses! the mind too! A good thing! A good thing! I will make this little woman my orderly. I will take her to Baku and we shall have evenings for artists. But silence! Let us be discreet as the troubadours until to-morrow."

The new toasts they all drank intensified the brightness of the Splendours of Beauty, Djemileh and Talhemeh. Omm-Djehane kept apart near the two sedate Moslems, who, without seeming to do so, protected her effectively. The terrible noise, the dances that began anew and kept up for several hours longer, all the delights of the party, finally ended in their waiting until the governor was carried to bed; the chief of police reached his on the shoulders of four men; half the officers slept on the battlefield; the rest, overcome, fell here and there on the streets. The three dancers did, or did not, return to their home;

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

the exact detail of this was never known. Omm-Djehane alone peacefully returned to the common household under the protection of the friends whom she had secured and who left her while they cursed with all their hearts the vile swine of Christians whom prudence obliged them to treat cautiously. As for Assanoff, he conducted Moreno back to their quarters at the post-office; then, seeing it was almost time for his rendezvous, he hurried and ran to place himself opposite the door of the dancer, without giving any sign of life, as Omm-Djehane had told him.

The street was deserted and absolutely silent; the night dark; it was three hours before dawn. It was the beginning of September. It had rained during the day and was no longer hot. The waiting was short. Assanoff, who was all ears, heard walking in the house; the door opened softly. A low voice asked:

“Are you there?”

He put his arm through the opening of the door, seized the extended hand and answered:

“Certainly! How would I not be? Am I a fool?”

Omm-Djehane drew the officer inside and closed the door as silently as she had opened it; then, preceding her guest, she quickly crossed a small central court of the house and entered the principal room. Here there were divans against the wall, some chairs and a table with a lighted lamp.

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

Omm-Djehane faced the officer and looked at him so arrogantly that he involuntarily stepped back. Then, amazed, he gazed at the young girl. She had taken off her dancer's costume and was dressed like a noblewoman of Daghestan, and she wore a pair of pistols and a knife at her belt. Whether intentionally or by chance, her right hand touched her weapons for a moment. Imperiously she offered a chair to Assanoff, and she herself sat down on the divan a few steps away from him. She held the rosary in her hand which she had used for the ceremony of Istikhareh, the first time she appeared in person in this story; and, during the interview that followed, she kept twisting and slipping the coral beads through her fingers.

"Welcome to you, Murad! For the past four years I have constantly asked this rosary if I would see you. To-day it told me I would. That is why I went to the governor's, and here you are."

"From the way you receive me, I do not understand how I come to be here."

"You will understand, son of my aunt."

"What do you mean?"

"I was four and you were twelve. I remember, and you have forgotten! Oh, son of my blood, brother of my soul!" she suddenly cried, and passionately extended her trembling hands to the young man. "When you sleep, don't you see our *aoul*, our village, on its

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

rocky peak, rising straight up into the blue sky with the clouds beneath it, in the valleys full of trees and stones? Do you not see the nest where we were born, high above the plains, above the other mountains, high above the slave-like men, amidst the homes of noble birds, in a godlike atmosphere? Do you not see the protecting walls, our towers, tilted over the abysses, our terraced mansions, one climbing on top of the other, all watchful and through their casement windows eager to see the enemy from far off? And the flat roofs, where we slept in summer, and the narrow streets, the home of Kassem-Bey opposite ours and that of Arslan-Bey in front, and your playfellows, Selim and Murad, who died in their blood, and my companions, Ayeshah, Lulu, Peri and the little Zo-beideh, whose mother carried her in her arms? Ah, wretched coward! The soldiers threw them all into the flames and the camp burnt over them."

Assanoff began to feel extremely uncomfortable. Drops of perspiration beaded his brow. Mechanically he braced his tightly clenched hands against his knees, but he did not say a word. Omm-Djehane continued in a hollow voice:

"Don't you ever dream at night? You lie down and sleep overtakes you and you stay there—isn't it so?—like an inert mass of flesh, abandoned by your thought till morning, or even till the middle of the

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

day. At bottom, you are right! Your whole life is nothing but a living death! Don't you remember anything, anything at all? Your uncle is my own father, my father, do you know that? No, you don't know it! I will tell you. My father, Elam-Bey, was hung from a tree on the left where the path mounted. Your own father, my uncle, was nailed by a bayonet to the door of his house. You don't remember? You were only twelve years old, but I was four and I have forgotten nothing! No, nothing, nothing! I tell you not the slightest, the most minute detail! Your uncle, when I was carried past him by a soldier, your uncle hung from his tree as that garment on the wall behind you hangs from a nail."

Assanoff felt an icy chill in his bones; he seemed to feel his uncle's feet dangling against his shoulders, but he did not say a word.

"Then," continued Omm-Djehane, "they took you with some boys who had by chance escaped the fire and massacre. They sent you to the cadet school at St. Petersburg and they brought you up, as the French say. They took away your memory, your heart, your religion, without even troubling to give you another; but they taught you to drink well, and I find your features already blemished from debauchery, the cheeks marked with blue veins. A man? No! A thing! You know it yourself."

Assanoff was humiliated, crushed by this girl, espe-



## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

cially by the too exact, raw, true images she evoked. Assanoff tried to defend himself.

"I learned something just the same," he murmured. "I know my soldier's profession. They have never accused me of lacking courage. I do not disgrace my family. I have honour."

"Honour? You!" cried Omm-Djehane, beside herself. "Go tell that nonsense to people of your kind! But do not think you can impress me with those big words. Have I not also been nourished by the Russians? Honour! That is, to wish to be blunt when one lies, to pass for honest when one is only a rascal and to be considered loyal when one cheats at cards. If one meets a scoundrel of one's own sort, both, men of honour, fight, and are killed on the very day when, by some accident, they happen not to be wrong. That is honour; and if you have it, son of my aunt, you can consider yourself a perfect European, wicked, false, a thief, a murderer, without faith, without law, without God, a swine, drunk with every kind of drunkenness, rolling in the mire of all vices."

The virulence of this attack seemed excessive to Assanoff, and this gave him some self-possession.

"He who wishes to prove too much proves nothing," he said coldly. "Let us not argue, rightly or wrongly, but it is a fact that without asking me they made a civilized man of me. That is what I have become. I have to stay so. You cannot prove that I do

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

any wrong in living as my comrades live. Besides, to hide nothing from you, I am bored. I don't know why. I lack nothing and everything. If a bullet finds me, I shall welcome it. If drink carries me off, a lot of good it will do. That is all I desire. Come! Omm-Djehane, I am glad to see you. Why didn't you stay with the general's lady? That was better than this house."

"That woman," answered the dancer with hate and scorn, "that woman! She had the insolence to say before me more than once that she wished to replace my mother. She often said, in my presence, that the Lesghis were only savages, and one day, when I answered that their blood was purer than hers, she laughed! That woman once took me in her arms and put me out of the room like a servant because I got up on a chair, being too small to reach their idols and throw them down! Besides, you know it is her husband who led the troops against our camp!"

Omm-Djehane was silent a minute and then suddenly cried out:

"I was only waiting for the day when I would be strong enough. Six months later I would have killed her two daughters."

"Well, you are quite a girl," said Assanoff, laughing. "Fortunately, you let them suspect it and they chased you away in time."

He spoke in a light tone, in contrast with hers.

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

Omm-Djehane looked at him a second, without a word, then she reached for a *tar*, thrown carelessly on the divan, and absent-mindedly began to tune it. Gradually, unconcernedly, she began to play and sing. Her voice was very sweet and penetrating. First she sang very softly and could hardly be heard. It sounded like isolated chords; notes followed one another disconnectedly. Gradually a definite melody grew out of the indistinct air, just as from the depth of a fog an ethereal apparition arises, advances, little by little, and finally makes itself known. In the grip of an irresistible emotion, a violent curiosity and a powerful memory, Assanoff raised his head and listened. He listened with all his ears, all his intelligence, all his heart and soul.

Soon there were words to the song. It was a Lesghi poem. It was the favourite song and often sung by the daughters of the tribe when Assanoff was a child. It is well known what supreme power and effective magic this kind of influence exerts over mountaineers living in the heart of small communities where there are few distractions. The memory of these songs is always supreme in their imagination. The Swiss have the *Ranz des Vaches* and the Scotch the call of the bagpipe. Assanoff was affected in exactly the same way.

He had been born quite near Baku, in the heart of the most singular, the grandest imaginable accumu-

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

lation of rocky precipices, where there is an assemblage of pointed peaks, widely separated from each other by deep valleys and rising from narrow bases up to the clouds. Gigantic needles cover the narrow, rocky plateaus where, from a distance, one would swear that only eagles could have their nests. There, catching hold as best they can, are the villages, the *aouls* of these terrible men, who only know battle, pillage and destruction. The Lesghis are always there, always sentinels on the watch for prey, suspicious of attack, seeing far, watching all.

Omm-Djehane's song awoke a poignant memory in Assanoff's shaken soul and he almost saw the paternal *aoul*. He saw everything again, everything he thought he had forgotten, everything! The fortified outer wall, the precipices whose murderous depths his childish eyes had once explored with indomitable curiosity; the street, the flat roofs burned by the sun or disappearing under the snow; the houses, his house, his room, his father, his mother, his relatives, his friends, his enemies. There was nothing he did not see again. The words Omm-Djehane was singing, the rhymes intersecting one another, gripped him as if with talons and carried him to the mountain ravines, to the paths where, hidden in a thicket, he often spied upon the march of the Russian columns, so as to go and warn his father; for, amongst the Lesghis, noble children are brave, cunning soldiers

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

from the day they can walk. A sublime enchantment filled the soul of the thinly civilized barbarian. His habits were European, his vices spoke Russian and French; but the depth of his nature, his instincts, his qualities and aptitudes, what he possessed of virtue, all this was still Tartar, as was the best of his blood.

And what happened to Murad, son of Hassan, officer of the engineers in the service of His Imperial Majesty, former pupil of the cadet school, winner of prizes in examinations, when his cousin rose, still singing and playing the *tar*, and began a slow, strongly accented dance across the room? He got up from his chair and threw himself on the floor in a corner and took his head between his hands; his fingers convulsively twisted in his hair, and, through the tears that obscured his eyes, he followed, greedily and sadly, the movements of the dance, just as he had done with Forough-el-Husnet, but with more anguish and passion, as was only natural. It was true that Omm-Djehane danced entirely differently from her teacher. Her steps meant more, her gestures were more restrained, but more thrilling. It was the dance of the *aoul*, the song of the *aoul*; a sort of electric current emanated from the young girl and completely enveloped her relative. Suddenly, abruptly, she stood still, stopped singing, threw the *tar* on the cushions, and, crouching at Assanoff's side, threw her arm around his neck.

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

"Do you remember?" she said.

He sobbed, cried in anguish and buried his head on his cousin's knees. It was pitiable to see this big fellow shaken by such grief.

"Then you do remember," pursued the Lesghi. "You see how you find me? I was the servant of the Franks; I fled. I was the servant of the Moslems; they beat me. I ran into the woods, I almost died of hunger and cold! I am here, I do not want to stay—you understand why. You yourself—why did you come to-night? You see, you understand. They want to sell me to a Kaimakam, somewhere in Turkey. I accepted, afraid of worse, and so that they could not torment me any more. I am your flesh! I am your blood! Save me! Keep me near you, son of my uncle. Murad, my love, my blessing, my dear soul, save me!"

She took his head and kissed him passionately.

"I will save you," answered Assanoff, eagerly. "May all the devils strangle me if I do not save you! You are my whole family! Ah, the Russians! Confound them! They killed my all, they burned them, they destroyed them all! But I will return them a hundredfold the wrong by which they overwhelmed me and you too. Do you want me to desert?"

"Yes, desert!"

"Shall we go into the mountains and join the other rebellious tribes?"





### THE DANCING GIRL OF SHAMAKHA

His fingers convulsively twisted . . . he followed, greedily and sadly, the movements of the dance.



## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

"Yes, let us go!"

"On my honour, I should like to do it too! And it shall be right away, to-morrow, or rather to-day, for it is nearly dawn. We shall become once more what we are, Lesghis and free! And I will marry you, daughter of my aunt, and you will be saved, and I too, because, after all, I am a Tartar too! What has Murad, son of Hassan-Bey, in common with all these Frank gentlemen? Don't I know what they amount to? Have you read Gogol? There is a writer! He disposed of them as they deserved! Oh, that rabble!"

Suddenly standing up, he paced up and down the room in an access of frenzy. Then he stopped in front of Omm-Djehane, looked fixedly at her, took her two hands and said:

"You are really very pretty. I love you with all my heart. I will marry you. I swear it. We shall have Russian heads on the table at the marriage feast. Does that suit you?"

"Indeed it does, and for each head a thousand kisses!"

"You know French?"

"Yes, I know it."

"So much the better; it will amuse us to speak it sometimes."

"Murad, son of Hassan-Bey, what a disgrace. Forget these infamies forever and ever!"

"You are right. I am a Tartar and nothing else,

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

and I want to be only that, and may I be cut into a thousand pieces if our children are not perfect Moslems. But enough of talking. This is what we must do. I will leave you, as it is nearly day. At noon come to me at the post-house. There I will dress you as my orderly. We will leave at one o'clock in a big *tarantass* they have lent me. We will get away quickly. Six leagues from here we will leave the road, and good night! The Russians will never see you here again, and, as for me, they will only see me sword in hand."

Omm-Djehane threw herself in his arms. They embraced and Assanoff left.

Once in the street he was delighted with himself—delighted with his plans and very much in love with his adorable cousin. It must be admitted that he had completely forgotten his travelling companion, as he was only able to follow one thought at a time, and when he told Omm-Djehane to meet him at the post-house he did not remember that Moreno was there waiting for him. He suddenly thought of this.

"Plague on it, what a blunder!"

But he did not worry about it; for he was no more in the habit of worrying than of thinking.

"I will confide all to Moreno. He has conspired. He knows how things are. Instead of hindering, he will help me."

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

When he entered the room where the Spaniard was sleeping on a bed of hides, he woke him uncereemoniously.

"My compliments," he said. "Who sold you that magnificent bed? I did not know you had it."

"You knew it very well. I got it at Tiflis through the efforts of a compatriot, and you ought to remember it because on that occasion you explained learnedly to my great surprise that all the Jews of the Caucasus are Spanish Jews. But I do not imagine you are waking me up at dawn, after a dinner and party such as we had yesterday, to examine me on the persecutions of Philip II, as a result of which the Hebrews fled to Salonica and from Salonica pushed on as far as here."

"No, not exactly, but forgive me. I am in a slight difficulty. I am trusting myself to your honour. Omm-Djehane is my cousin. I have resolved to marry her. I want to escape to the mountains with her. In short, I desert and declare war against the Russians."

Don Juan, amazed, jumped from his bed.

"Are you crazy?" he said to his companion.

"I have been, all my life, and expect to be to my last breath. But this time, I will be doing the most generous, the most chivalrous and the most noble act imaginable, and I do not think you will be the one to dissuade me from it."

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

"And why that, if you please?"

"Because you did exactly the same thing, and that is why I have the happiness of being your friend."

"Come now! There is not the least connection. I plotted because my companions did so and I did not want to part from them. Besides, the agitation was about my legitimate prince. What you want to do is simply brigandage! You go off to some bandits with a worthless baggage, permit me to say it to you, and from the elegant, amiable man that you are, from a brilliant officer born to shine in every drawing-room, you are planning to turn yourself into a rude savage, a target to be shot at."

"You forget that my father was a rude savage. He was shot as you say."

"My poor friend, I would be disconsolate if I offended you. But, since your father came to such an unenviable end, you shouldn't embrace it of your own free will. Listen, Assanoff, let us be reasonable, if we can. Was your father a savage? Well, you are not. What's wrong about that? Men cannot all resemble each other from generation to generation. Shall I tell you the effect you have on me?"

"Speak frankly."

"You make me want to laugh, for if you continue you will be ridiculous."

The engineer blushed deeply. The fear of becoming ridiculous upset him. However, he was stubborn.



## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

"My dear friend, Omm-Djehane will come very soon. You know I will not send her away. On the other hand, will you betray me? Ridiculous or not, the wine is poured. It must be drunk."

Whereupon, he sat down, whistled and poured out a glass from a small decanter within his reach.

Moreno knew he must not oppose him. So he did not insist any more and silently busied himself with his morning toilet. Assanoff was not very loquacious either, and only interrupted his reverie with a few insignificant words, spoken casually from time to time. He was very much perplexed. He was troubled at his friend's opposition, and now, in cold blood, his project did not seem as practicable or as simple to carry out as it had in the midst of his enthusiasm and transport. Omm-Djehane had deeply stirred his soul, partly because of their relationship, partly through her beauty, but, above all, by her extraordinary nature. But, to marry her—candidly he thought her very backward, for all that she knew French.

In truth, poor Assanoff was neither Russian nor savage nor civilized but a little of each, and the poor beings who are deformed like this by periods or countries in transition are very imperfect and wretched and more prone to vices and calamities than virtues and happiness. To get an idea and find an expedient, he began to drink, and after several glasses he hit upon a solution for his most pressing embarrassment,

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

the imminent arrival of Omm-Djehane. This solution was most simple. It consisted in his taking his cap while Moreno's back was turned and leaving his faithful friend to arrange everything as he thought best with the cousin whom he had so suddenly made his travelling companion, accomplice and betrothed.

As the clock struck twelve, Omm-Djehane left her lodging without difficulty, since the dancers who had returned by the grace of God had nothing more urgent and important to do than to seek repose in their beds. Omm-Djehane, veiled like the Tartar women, took roundabout streets and, arriving at the post-house, knocked discreetly at the door. Assanoff's orderly opened it. She quickly passed in front of the soldier without saying anything to him, and he, thinking this woman was expected by the officers, never even thought of questioning her. The dancer entered the room where Moreno was busy strapping his valise for the departure to take place in an hour.

He raised his eyes at the sound, saw the young girl and instinctively looked about for Assanoff. Omm-Djehane did not give him the time to be embarrassed.

"Sir," she said, "I have come here to find Lieutenant Assanoff. He must have told you I am his cousin, and as he cannot have failed to confide in you, he certainly must have added that I am his betrothed. Since he is away, allow me to wait for him."

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

"Mademoiselle," answered Moreno coldly, offering a chair to the newcomer, "you are right. Assanoff did confide in me. I know you are his cousin or at least that he believes you are. But, as for being his betrothed and all the rest which you are not mentioning, we are not that far yet, and I beg you to change your plans."

"Why, sir?"

"Mademoiselle, you will ruin Assanoff without any profit to yourself."

Omm-Djehane looked aggressive.

"Who says I look for a profit? Did Assanoff charge you to speak to me in this way?"

Moreno felt that he must not let himself be carried away by his zeal. He drew back, as they say in fencing, and parried differently.

"Look here, mademoiselle, you are an unusual person, and it is not necessary to look long at you to read your soul in your face. Do you love Assanoff?"

"Not at all."

Her eyes were full of contempt.

"Then what are you going to make of him?"

"A man! He is a woman, a coward, a drunkard. He believes all he hears and I can twist him about as I like. How do you imagine I can love him? But he is the son of my uncle, my only remaining relative. I will not have him disgrace himself any longer. He will take me home with him. I am his wife.

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

Whom else would you have me marry? I will break him of his shameful habits. I will wait on him and take care of him, and when he is killed it will be as a hero by his enemies and I will avenge him."

Moreno was astonished. He had relatives in the mountains of Barcelona, but he knew no Catalonian man or woman with the force of this little woman. To find a worthy rival for her, he would have to climb up to the Almogávares, and he had not the time to look so far.

"I beg you, mademoiselle, be less fiery. Assanoff does not deserve to be spoken of in that tone. He is a gallant man, and you should not drag him away to drift."

"Who will prevent me?"

"I."

"You?"

"Exactly."

"Then—who are you?"

"Juan Moreno, former lieutenant of the infantry of Segovia; to-day, flag-bearer in the dragoons of Imeretia, a great ladies' man, but a little obstinate."

Before he had finished he saw a glittering, shining blade an inch from his chest. Instinctively he raised his arm in time to seize Omm-Djehane's wrist just as the sharp knife was entering his flesh. He twisted the enemy's arm and pushed her back without loosing his hold. She had not let her weapon fall. She looked at

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

him with the eyes of a tigress. He stared at her with the eyes of a lion, for he was furious, and he pushed her violently against the wall.

"Well, mademoiselle," he said, "what is the meaning of this childishness? If I were not who I am, I would treat you as you deserve."

"What would you do?" asked Omm-Djehane, impetuously.

Moreno laughed, and releasing her at once, without making any move to disarm her, he answered:

"I would kiss you, mademoiselle, for that is what happens to young girls who annoy the boys."

While speaking, he drew his handkerchief from his pocket and applied it to his chest. The blood flowed freely and was staining his shirt. The thrust had been well aimed, but, fortunately, had not penetrated far, or Moreno would have been stretched out on the floor, never to rise again.

Omm-Djehane smiled and said triumphantly:

"It would not have taken much more. Another time my hand will be steadier."

"Thanks! The next time I will be on guard, and take note that you have completely spoiled your affair. Come, Assanoff, look at Mademoiselle's lovely imagination."

Assanoff was on the threshold, his face crimson, his eyes popping out of his head. He was completely stupefied with the *raki* of the chief of police, and

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

Heaven decreed that drunkenness should give him a horror of Omm-Djehane.

"May the devil take her, this mademoiselle. What has she been doing? Look here, Omm-Djehane, leave me alone. What old tales have you been telling me? Do you think I care about the Caucasus and the brutes who live there? My father and my mother? Listen, I say it between ourselves, they were infamous brigands, and as for my aunt, ah, the old witch! You can't deny she was an old witch. Moreover, I am going to spend next winter in Paris! I will dine at the most famous cafés! I will frequent the little theatres! You'll come with me, Moreno, isn't that so? You will come with me! Ah, my little brother, don't leave me. We'll go to the opera! Come, Omm-Djehane, come, give me your arm! There you will see, ah, there you will see young women who dance a bit better than you, I swear it! Listen, no, come nearer and let me tell you something. Shall we go to Mabilie? It seems that is all that is most—"

They say that the fixity of a man's look works on brutes in a marvellous way—that it terrifies them—makes them step back, and in some way sets them at naught. Whether that is true or not, Assanoff could not meet the eyes the young girl fastened upon him. He was silent. He turned to right and left, seeking to escape from his uneasiness. This additional confusion finally succeeded in completely upsetting his



## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

faculties, and he fell on the bed and lay there motionless.

“Sir, you must be satisfied! I see and you see that your friend is in no condition to commit the folly you feared. I congratulate you. He is even more civilized than I thought. He denied his father. He attacked the memory of the woman who gave him birth. You heard him insult his family, and he confessed to you what his country is to him. As for me, I cannot divine why the heavens spared us both from the destruction of the tribe and gave into my woman’s bosom the heart he should have had, while he has the cowardice which I ought not to blush for. Well, things are like that. We cannot change them. God is my witness! Since I can remember I have had but one desire—to see him who is sleeping there—who is flattened out like an unclean beast. Yes! God knows it! Knowing he was alive, I kept repeating, during my deepest suffering: ‘All is not lost. Nothing is lost! He lives! Murad! He will help me.’ I remember, amongst others, one of the most miserable nights in my miserable existence. I was alone in the depths of a wood, crouching between the roots of the trees. For two days I had eaten only a piece of stale biscuit, thrown out on the edge of an encampment by the soldiers. It was winter; the snow fell on me. I consulted my rosary and the infallible spell repeated: ‘You will see him again! You will see him again!’ And, in the

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

depths of my horrible and terrible misery, hope sustained me. Every day, since then, I said to myself, 'I will see him again.' But, where, when? The Istikhareh said, 'Soon!' and that it was to be here. I came here. Yesterday the same prediction was repeated. I was assured that the moment was approaching, and I actually did see him, and there he is. You see him too. You are a European and no doubt proud of what your equals have done. As for me, I am only a barbarian—you will permit me to be of a different opinion. Keep him! He will not find me amongst the warriors of his nation! He will not fight to avenge his country! I do not say it to absolve him. I know what is no longer possible. He will not protect his cousin, the last, the only girl of his race. He will not take her away from misery and despair. No! No! No! He thrusts her away! Farewell, sir, and if the curse of a feeble being who never did you any harm can weigh in the balance of your destiny, may it weigh all. . . ."

"No, Omm-Djehane, no! Do not curse me! I do not deserve it! Forgive the harsh-sounding words I used to you; I did not know you. Now that I know what you are, I would do anything I could to help you. Come, my dear child, sit down here. Speak to me as a brother. I think as you do; we live in a troublesome world, whether barbarous or civilized, and the best is worth nothing. What do you need? Will

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

money help you? I have not got much. Here is what I have left—take it. I would like to help you above everything. You look at me! I am not holding out a trap to you! And as for poor Assanoff! If I had not turned him from you he would have turned away himself. You know his habits now. What could you expect of him?”

“Then you don’t get drunk?” asked Omm-Djehane in a surprised voice.

“It is not the custom in my country,” he answered.

“But, come let us talk about you. What will become of you? What are your plans?”

She kept her eyes on Moreno’s for several moments and said:

“Do you love a woman in your country?”

“Yes, I love a woman!”

“Do you love her very much?”

“With all my soul!”

Omm-Djehane gathered her veil about her, covered her face, and moved towards the door. Stopping at the threshold, she turned back towards Moreno and said, with all the emphasis Asiatics give to such sayings:

“May God’s blessing be upon her!”

The officer was touched to the depths of his heart. Omm-Djehane had disappeared. Assanoff snored like a humming-top. The orderly came to announce that the horses were harnessed and the *tarantass* waited.

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

They carried the engineer into the carriage, and the two friends departed from Shamakha at a gallop, soon leaving the little city far behind them in the whirls of dust raised by the four wheels in their haste.

The scenery before and behind Shamakha towards Baku is grand and singularly majestic. It is not the usual scene of the Caucasus. Wild crags abound, forests full of shadows and horrors, valleys where the sun adventures but does not linger; enormous torrents fall in foaming sheets of water on the backs of gigantic rocks, causing furious currents in their struggle with these boulders. Narrow, stifling passes, gorges like those of Souram whose slopes, height and dizziness recall what one reads in stories; then, across all this, lazy rivers which form the transition from these troubled pictures to the scenes spread out in the big valley that leads to Baku. There, on the contrary, there is plenty of space, clear air, limpid light; a clayey soil, dust in summer but fine, impalpable, suffocating dust; in winter, deep mud where the lightest *troikas* sink to the hub. Running parallel, to left and right, are the distant mountain-ranges; this is already an outpost of the great valleys and chains of immense expanses of Persia.

Moreno was so preoccupied, thinking of the unexpected meeting with the dancer and especially of how to explain and understand her, that he was almost insensible to the grand scene through which he was

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

passing in the carriage with its four horses, and he remained lost in his thoughts. The wound in his chest pained him a little. The flesh had certainly been cut into. Don Juan dressed it as best he could. However, this unpleasant sensation, this violent shock through which, in the flash of an eye, the young Lesghi had taught the officer what she was, left no bitterness in the memory he was to retain of his interview with her, and Moreno's final judgment was sound and wise. Perhaps a German, a man of the North, would have been at a loss to understand a temperament that a Spaniard felt was more harmonious with his own.

Omm-Djehane, the poor girl, had never for an instant in her life forgotten the emotion she had felt when her *aoul* was taken. She had always seen and still saw the flames devouring her home, the corpses of her people falling on each other, the fierce, furious faces of the soldiers. She kept hearing the cries of distress and despair, the reports of the firearms, the shouts of the victors. She could absolutely not understand the care the general's family took of her, in her infancy, and thought she was in the midst of assassins. She looked upon herself not only as a slave, but as a humiliated slave, and the unconcerned way in which her protector, an excellent woman, told each visitor the little Lesghi's true story, to make the child more interesting, was always resented by Omm-Djehane as the height of insult. She saw in it only the

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

boasts and arrogance of the victors. It was hard to teach her, although, like all Asiatics and especially people of her nationality, she was wonderfully intelligent. Besides, having noticed that knowledge was looked upon as a merit, and that the general's daughters did not learn as well or as easily as she did, that they were scolded and cried at each success of hers, she redoubled her efforts and experienced much joy in causing them this trouble. For a while she had an entirely different idea. Not doubting for an instant that the Russians, whom, in her childish fancy, she hated and disdained, owed all their success to sorcery, she decided she would become a magician. But, although she read all that she could lay hands on, without finding anything to assist her aim, and became discouraged, she never doubted that powerful sorcery was at the base of all her affairs, for, in mind and heart, she always remained a Lesghi, and the form and nature of her spirit no more changed than her affections.

She had always known, as she had told Assanoff, that he had escaped from the massacre and had been educated at the Cadet School. In him she saw her future husband. According to her way of reasoning, she could have no other. Her dreams were founded on this. All the decisions she had taken except those of rage and hate, which she was never able to control entirely, were always with the object of drawing nearer to her cousin. She was too mistrustful to ask advice of



## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

any one except the Istikhareh, but she had absolute confidence in the oracles of her chaplet of beads. Having become a dancing-girl to earn a living, she was not in the least humbled. The dancing-girls of Shamakha have a glorious reputation, and, besides, the women of Asia are neither above nor below any social ladder. They fill any sphere in life. They may be wives, empresses, or servants, and yet they remain women. This allows them to say anything and do anything and yet have no responsibility for logic or justice in their thoughts or acts. They reckon only with passion which, according to its will, belittles, kills or crowns them. Omm-Djehane was not vicious—far from it—she was chaste and pure, but she was not virtuous either, for, if she had felt inclined, she would have renounced her chastity in a second, without a struggle, without resistance and even without the slightest suspicion of being in the wrong. It is not likely that she would have abandoned her modesty for a Frank. She professed too much aversion for that race. Gregory Ivanitch, the Enemy of the Spirit, had once thought he keenly desired the young dancer and naturally had no scruple in showing her how he felt. From that side she had been in no danger, but the Splendours of Beauty, her mistress, had followed this up with a series of counsels and insinuations, mingled with reproaches, tempered by the fear that Omm-Djehane inspired in all who were near her. The young

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

girl did not yield because she was waiting for Assanoff, and the Istikhareh assured her, more and more, that he would soon come. It was to have peace that she consented to be sold as a slave or wife. It was all one to her—the old Kaimakam near Trebizond. She was gaining time, and it would not disturb her in the least to break her word, if necessary, at the last moment. Such was Omm-Djehane, such she had been until now, a pathetic creature, profoundly unhappy and to be pitied, although she did not cry about herself and asked pity from no one.

As has been said, Moreno appreciated the essentials of the situation. Some hours later Assanoff awoke. He was grumbling and sullen; he did not mention Omm-Djehane and made no allusion to what had occurred at Shamakha; he was so prostrated, morally and physically, that Moreno was sorry for him. He realized that a terrible struggle between instincts, tastes, habits, weaknesses, concessions, and remorse was going on in the Tartar's heart, and none of the contending forces was strong enough to win.

The journey ended very sadly, and the effect of his friend's condition made the exiled Spaniard begin to find life unbearable. The first view of the city, as the carriage entered Baku, did not restore his cheerfulness.

The Caspian, that mysterious and sombre sea, more inhospitable even than Europe, covered the far-away horizon along two-thirds of its shores with leaden

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

waters over which the heavens hung grey and low. It had just rained. The streets and roads revealed three feet of yellowish, sticky mud from which wagons, men and animals had difficulty in extricating themselves. The suburbs were composed of wooden houses, built in the Russian style. The government stores, storage-yards and factories, whose high chimneys sent their coal-smoke heavenward, were peopled by a half-Tartar, half-military crowd. Once in a while, a lady, dressed as a European, passed by in a hat recalling Occidental fashions. The ancient fortification of the royal Tartar residence still had its clover-shaped gate, and when the carriage passed by little native beggars followed it, showing off, and howling in a pitiable voice in French:

“Give us money, Mousiou Bandaloun!”

This meant that they were asking for money, and that they would also accept a pair of trousers. Such was the kind of education the gay young officers dispensed in their liberal fashion. In the narrow streets, most of the houses were still in the old style, and there, amidst numerous signboards of Russian merchants and artisans, one read such information as this: “*Bot-tier de Paris*,” “*Marchand de Modes*.” It must be confessed that these enticements to public credulity were slightly fallacious, and the merchandise in these shops was not of a kind to deceive the most ingenuous buyer as to its origin.

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

Once arrived, Assanoff was distracted by the movement. He shook himself and returned to his natural state of mind. Besides, he had had his awakening. On his side, Moreno, presented to his colonel, well received by his comrades, fêted by the Europeans and feeling himself driven by necessity, strove to look backwards less. At the end of three months he had regained his lieutenant's epaulets. He took part in an expedition, showed himself worthy, and became a captain. Soldiers view life in a special way. If they were allowed to choose between paradise, with the loss of their rank, and hell, with a high rank, very few would hesitate, and, as for those who would choose God's presence, there is no doubt that for all eternity they would deplore their decision. But for many years Don Juan's heart's desires had been turned towards Spain. His love no longer caused him the sharp pain of the first months. It had become a tender habit, a melancholy preoccupation in which his soul was steeped. He wrote often and his mistress replied. They hoped, as much as they could hope, to see an end to their separation. When politics lifted the axe it had let fall between them, material circumstances did not allow Moreno to leave the Caucasus, for he had nothing but his pay and could not begin another calling, and the young woman was not rich either and could not join her lover. So the matter rested. Neither of

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

them married, and in time they ceased being unhappy; but happy they never were.

Long before this happened, Moreno, returning home one night from the governor-general's, where he had spent the evening, saw from afar a woman walking in the same direction that he was through the deserted street along the ancient palace of the Tartar khan, which was then reduced to a powder storehouse. It was winter. It was cold. Several inches of snow covered the ground. Everything was frozen. The night was black. Moreno thought:

“Who can that unfortunate woman be?”

The captain had seen much misery and many disasters. His own life had not been gay. Under such circumstances, a man becomes bad or very good. Moreno was very good.

As well as he could see in the dark, he pityingly followed this solitary creature with his eyes; and, observing that she faltered and stumbled in walking, he hastened his steps to join her and help her. To his astonishment, he saw her stop right in front of his door, and then he heard rapid steps behind him.

He turned and instantly recognized the Doukhobor, Gregory Ivanitch, hatless and without an overcoat, hurrying as much as his greatly increased corpulence allowed. Moreno imagined, what was indeed true, that the Enemy of the Spirit was trying to catch up with

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

the woman, and it passed through his mind that he had some evil intention. He seized him by the arm and cried out sharply:

“Where are you going?”

“Ah, Captain, I beg you do not hold me back. The poor girl has escaped.”

“Who? What girl are you talking about?”

“This is not the time for talking, Captain; but, since you are here, help me to save her. Perhaps we will still be able to do so. Alas, it is certain that if any one can calm her it will be you!”

He swept Moreno along. Astonished, the Spaniard consented; and when he was only a few steps from his house, to his dismay, he saw the woman reach out to the door to support herself and stagger; she was about to fall on the threshold. He caught her in his arms and looked at her. It was Omm-Djehane.

Seeing him, she had a sort of electric spasm which gave her a moment's strength. She threw her arms around his neck, kissed him ardently, and said only one word to him:

“Farewell!”

Then her arms relaxed, she fell back. He looked at her, astounded, and indeed he saw she was dead.

At this moment, Gregory Ivanitch joined him and helped him to support the lifeless body which Moreno wanted to carry into his house.

“No,” said the Enemy of the Spirit, shaking his



## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

head, "the unfortunate child became ill in my house. I will bury her, and at my own expense. She is dead. She did not love me, but I wished her well, and that suffices for me to consider myself her only relative."

"Tell me what happened?"

"Very little. She did not want to be sold. She refused to go to Trebizond. She refused to dance, and, what had never happened to her or been heard of before, she spent her days and nights crying, beating her breast and tearing her face with her nails. The Splendours of Beauty did not know what to do with her and wanted to get rid of her. I said to Omm-Djehane: 'My daughter, you are losing your mind, and it is visibly the doing of the Spirit. Give up your foolish ideas. Drink! Laugh! Sing! Amuse yourself! Give in to every whim! You are young, pretty, admired. You dance like a fairy! The general himself will be at your feet, if you like. Why don't you?'

"She answered, 'Because I love and am not loved in return.'

"We could find out nothing more. But I who, in spite of myself, had at first been in love with her, out of my fondness for her took her to my farm, where she consented to come. I nursed her and tried to distract her, and what could you expect? From crying so much, she began to cough, and I sent for the doctor. This man told her to take care of herself and avoid catching cold. Do you know what she did? She

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

went and rolled in the snow! Ah, the Spirit, the Spirit! Don't speak of it to me! You are all blind, you gentiles! In the end, three days ago, she actually said what I am going to repeat to you. It is pure folly, but these are her exact words. She said to me: 'Take me to Baku.'

" 'Why?' I asked.

" 'To die,' she answered.

"Choked with grief, I answered sharply, 'You can die here just as well as at Baku.'

" 'No, I want to die on Captain Moreno's threshold.'

"I thought she was delirious. She had never mentioned your name. Never! I say not once! But she became excited and answered in anger: 'Don't you understand me?'

"When she was angry the blood gushed from her throat and she suffered for hours. I gave in.

" 'Very well, we will go.'

"We came here. Just now she sent me for help, assuring me she felt worse, and it was only too true. While I was obeying her . . . you see!"

The poor man's speech ended in a sob.

Moreno was deeply grieved. This was not reasonable. The best thing that could have happened to Omm-Djehane had occurred. What would have become of her? If she had remained a true Lesghi, Assanoff's forsaking her and the abandoning of her first

## *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha*

dreams would not have shattered her soul. She had suffered much and would have suffered again, but satisfied pride and a quiet conscience would have sustained her to the end. Whether she had continued to delight men of taste, in Shamakha, with the spell of her dancing, or had preferred the obscure harem of the Kaimakam, she might have had a long life, and like the women of the ancient patriarchs she might have seen the peaceful twilight fall on a peaceful and honored death. But she had become unfaithful to the gods of her country. She had defended herself and hardened herself against this and had bravely fallen a victim to her resistance. In the end, it was only too true, in the depths of her heart she had weakened. She had loved a Frank!

When Moreno told the whole story to Assanoff, the civilized Tartar was profoundly moved. He was not sober for eight days and went about everywhere singing the Marseillaise. After that he quieted down.



*The Lovers of Kandahar*





## *The Lovers of Kandahar*



YOU ask if he was handsome? Handsome as an angel! The complexion somewhat tanned, not that dark earthy colour that comes from a mongrel origin; he was warmly tanned like a fruit ripened in the sun. His black

hair curled in a profusion of ringlets over the tight folds of his blue, red-striped turban; a thin, wavy moustache, a little long, caressed the delicate lines of his upper lip, which was clean-cut, quivering, proud, full of life and passion. His soft, deep eyes lighted up and sparkled readily. He was tall, vigorous, slender, with wide shoulders and narrow hips. No one could have questioned his race; it was evident that the purest Afghan blood ran in his veins and that he was one of the authentic descendants of the ancient Parthians, Arsaces, and Orodes, under whom the Roman world trembled with justifiable terror. His mother, divining his worth, had named him at birth Mohsen, the beautiful, and with good reason.

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

Unfortunately, though faultless in external advantages, equally perfect in qualities of soul, and honored with a most illustrious pedigree, he lacked much; he was poor. He had just been provided with his equipment, as he had attained his seventeenth year, and this had not been simple. His father had furnished the sabre and shield; an old uncle had given him a gun, a poorish sort of weapon. Mohsen looked at it with sorrow and almost with shame. It had a miserable flint matchlock while several of the young gentleman's friends had fine English guns of the latest model. However, even an antiquated weapon was better than none. A cousin gave him an excellent knife, three feet long and four inches wide, as pointed as a needle and so heavy that a well-directed thrust could detach a limb. Mohsen slipped this redoubtable weapon in his belt and wished with all his might for a pair of pistols. But he had not the slightest idea how or where he could acquire such a treasure; here again money failed him cruelly.

Although he was not aware of it, he looked, armed as he was, like a prince. His father, without losing any of his cold, severe composure, scanned him from head to foot, but it was evident from the way he stroked his beard that inwardly he was very proud. His mother's eyes were drowned in tears and she passionately embraced her child. He was an only son. He kissed the hands of his parents and left the house,

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

intent upon carrying out three projects, the accomplishment of which he thought essential if he was to enter upon life with dignity.

The Mohsen family, as was to be expected from their rank, had two thorough-going hates and two grievances. They were a branch of the Ahmedziis and for the last three generations had had a feud with the Muradziis. The disagreement sprang from one of the latter's having once horsewhipped a vassal of the Ahmedziis. These vassals are not Afghans, and live under the authority of these gentlemen; they cultivate the land and pursue trades and can be maltreated by their own lords without any one objecting, but it is an unpardonable offence when some one else than their master lifts his hand against them, and honour commands their master to avenge them as terribly as if the blow or injury had fallen on a member of the seignorial family. The guilty Muradzii had been killed by a knife-thrust from Mohsen's grandfather. Since then, there had been eight murders between the two families; the last victims were an uncle and a first cousin of the hero of this story. The Muradziis were powerful and rich. There was imminent danger that the whole Ahmedzii family might perish from the wrath of these terrible enemies, and Mohsen thought of nothing less than immediately falling upon and killing Abdullah Muradzii himself, a lieutenant of the Prince of Kandahar. Such an act would make his

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

great courage known at the outset and could not fail to render his name formidable. This, however, was not the most pressing matter.

His father, Mahomet-Beg, had an elder brother called Osman who was the father of three sons and one daughter and had made some money serving the English, having been subahdar, or captain, for a long time in an infantry regiment in Bengal. He received his pension regularly through the agent, a Hindu banker, and this affluence filled him with pride. In addition, he had obstinate ideas about the art of war which he thought superior to those of his elder brother Mahomet who only valued personal courage. There had been several sharp altercations between the two brothers and the elder had felt, rightly or wrongly, that the respect due his age had not been properly observed. Their relations had become quite strained when one day Osman-Beg did not rise when Mahomet entered his room to visit him. Mohsen, who had accompanied his father, could not contain his indignation against this insult, and, not daring to take it out directly on his uncle, had given his youngest cousin Elem a good hard slap in the face. It was a most regrettable incident, as Mohsen and Elem had been very devoted to each other up to this time; they had been inseparable and it was these two children who were constantly scheming plans of vengeance which

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

would restore to their family the shining honour so regrettably clouded by the Muradziiis.

Elem, outraged at his cousin's action, had drawn his dagger and tried to throw himself upon him, but the old men had come between them and separated the fighters in time. The next day a bullet lodged in the right sleeve of Mohsen's garment. No one doubted this bullet was from Elem's gun. Six months passed and, while each spied upon the other, a menacing calm hovered over the adjoining dwellings. The women alone still met occasionally, and they insulted one another; the men avoided each other. For eight days Mohsen had been making up his mind to enter his uncle's house and kill Elem; his plans were already made. This was the second act he was to carry out. As for his third, it was this: After having killed Elem and Abdullah Muradzii, he would present himself before the Prince of Kandahar and summon him to employ him in his cavalry. Such a warrior as he would have proved himself, would without doubt be treated with respect and received with acclaim.

It would be doing him a wrong to suppose that the double action he was so intent upon was prompted by a mercenary motive. It was not easy, but very painful, for him to think of killing his cousin Elem. He had loved, he still loved the companion of his childhood; twenty times, in the course of every twenty-four hours,

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

as he dreamed over his plans and hit upon one that was more brilliant than the others, the image of Elem would appear before him like a flash and he would say to himself: "I shall tell him this! What would he think of it?" Then, suddenly, he would find himself back in reality, and without permitting himself a sigh he would thrust away these old thoughts that must not be permitted to live any longer. Honour was speaking, and honour alone must be heard. Let the Hindus and Persians abandon themselves to the current of their friendships, to the influence of what they liked, but an Afghan! What he owed to himself took precedence over everything. Neither affection nor pity should stop his arm when duty spoke. Mohsen knew this, and that was enough. He wished to be considered a man of heart and courage; there was not to be even the shadow of a reproach or a suspicion of frailty on his name. Persistence in such a noble sentiment is costly; an enviable name cannot be achieved without effort. Was the price too high? No. So Mohsen thought, and the brilliant pride shining in his face was the reflection of the demands of his soul.

He would carry out his vengeance. Not his personal injuries, for what were they? Who had ever offended him? He would avenge the insults inflicted on his own household. Public opinion and the justice of the prince would promptly assign to him, as a worthy reward for his fearlessness, rank and benefits. Nothing could be



## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

more natural, and it would not be wrong, or covetous for him to claim his due.

It was not yet late enough in the day for him to begin. He must seize the first hour of the evening, the moment when the shadows would fall over the city. To pass the time, he strolled along with calm steps towards the bazaar, in his bearing the cold dignity proper to a young man of noble birth.

Kandahar is a large and magnificent city. It is fortified with crenellated walls and flanked with towers bitten by many bullets. In one corner rises the citadel, the home of the prince, the scene of many revolutions, where no one is astonished or offended by the gleam of swords, the noise of gunfire, or the display of severed heads fastened to the door-posts. In the centre of a group of houses, many of them several stories high, vast, tangled passageways twist about like the arteries of a large body. On either side of these streets are the shops of the merchants who sit there smoking and answering their customers from small platforms on which are arranged the stuffs of India, Persia, and Europe, while along the rough, tortuous, unpaved road, very narrow at times and again very wide, moves a crowd of Ouzbeks, Kurds, and Kizzilbashis, packed together, buying, selling, running, forming groups. Files of camels follow one another, goaded on by the shouts of their drivers. Here and there a chief, richly dressed, on horseback, passes by surrounded by his men

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

who, with their guns on their shoulders, their shields on their backs, roughly disperse the crowd in order to make place for themselves. Elsewhere a foreign dervish howls a mystic word, recites prayers, and begs. Further on, a story-teller, seated on his heels on a rude wooden chair, holds an excited audience, while a soldier, serving some prince or nobleman, or merely, like Mohsen, seeking his fortune, passes silently, casting a contemptuous glance at these lowly people who timidly avoid him. Life for them is truly quite different from life for him. They can laugh; only beatings wound or affect them. Unless some accident overtakes them, they will live long; they are free to earn their living in a thousand ways; every one is well-disposed towards them; no one expects from them dignified manners or self-respect. The Afghan, on the contrary, in order to live up to his standard, spends his life watching himself and others and is always under suspicion, holds his honour high, is touchy to a degree and shy of a shadow. He knows in advance how short his life will be. The men of his race are rare who have not been mortally wounded before they are forty in retaliation for having struck or menaced others.

At last, the sun sank under the horizon and the first shadows spread along the streets; only the upper terraces were gilded by the sun. The Muezzins, all in harmony from the tops of the mosques, large and small, called out the prayer in strident, singsong voices. It

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

was, as always, the far-flung cry that rose in the air announcing that God alone is God and Mahomet is his prophet. Mohsen knew that his uncle, with his sons, attended evening prayers every day at this hour—all his sons without exception. This time, however, there was to be one. Elem, sick with fever, had been laid up for two days. Mohsen was sure to find him in bed, and the house deserted, for the women would have gone to the fountain. He had been watching since the beginning of the week and knew even the minutest detail.

Walking along, he shook his long knife in his belt to make sure the blade would not stick in the scabbard. He reached the door of his uncle's house and entered. Behind him he closed the double doors, lowered the bar, and turned the key in the lock. He did not want to be surprised or interrupted. What a dishonour if he should fail in his first undertaking!

He crossed the dark hall leading to a narrow court and passed through this court, jumping over a pool in the centre of it. Then he climbed three steps and went towards Elem's room. All of a sudden he was confronted by his cousin, who stood in the middle of the hall and barred his passage. She was fifteen and called Djemileh, "the fair."

"Greetings to you, son of my uncle!" she said. "You have come to kill Elem!"

Mohsen was dazed, his eyes were blurred. He had

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

not seen his cousin in five years. How the child, now a woman, had changed! She stood before him in all the perfection of a beauty that he had never imagined, enchanting in herself, adorable in her dress of red gauze with golden flowers, with her beautiful hair bound he knew not how, in blue veils embroidered in silver and brightened with a rose. His heart beat, his soul was enraptured, he could not utter a word. In a clear, penetrating, soft, irresistible voice, she continued:

“Do not kill him! He is my favourite. He is the brother I love the most! I love you too. I love you more. Take me as a ransom! Take me, son of my uncle. I will be your wife, I will follow you, I will be yours. Do you want me?”

She leaned gently towards him. He lost his head: without knowing what was happening or what he was doing he fell on his knees and gazed enchanted at the adorable apparition that was bending towards him. Heaven had opened before his eyes. He had never dreamed of anything like this. He gazed and gazed, he was happy, he was in pain, he did not think, he felt, he was in love, he was completely lost in this endless and silent contemplation. Djemileh, with a charming gesture, turning back a little, leaning against the wall and twisting her two arms above her head, drove him wild, as she glanced down at him; the spell and warmth of her, of her beautiful eyes, so affected



### THE LOVERS OF KANDAHAR

"Greetings to you, son of my uncle! You have come to kill Elem!"





## *The Lovers of Kandahar,*

him that he could not endure it. He bent his head low, low, till he found his mouth grazing a fold of her red-purple dress. He tenderly took the hem and raised it to his lips. Then Djemileh lifted her little bare foot and placed it on the shoulder of this man who, without a word, confessed himself her slave.

It was an electric shock. This magic contact roused almighty power in him. The young man's proud resolution, already much weakened, broke like a crystal under this almost insensible pressure, and an indescribable happiness, an unbounded felicity and unequalled joy, penetrated through the broken bits into the Afghan's whole soul. Love demands from each the gift of whatever is most precious to him; he who is really in love wants to give his most valued possession. Mohsen gave up his vengeance, his ideal of his honour, his liberty, himself, and instinctively sought in the profoundest depths of his being for more that he could give. What he had esteemed higher than heaven now seemed paltry in comparison with what he wished to lavish on his idol, and he felt himself to be still a debtor before his tremendous adoration.

On his knees and bending to the ground, holding the little foot on his shoulder, he raised his head to one side and looked at Djemileh. She looked at him too, and, palpitating, said very seriously:

"I am yours! Now go! Go this way for fear my

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

parents may meet you as they are coming in. You must not die. You are my life!"

She drew back her foot, took Mohsen's hand and lifted him up. He let himself be led. She drew him to the back of the house, towards an exit, listening for any dangerous sound. In truth, death surrounded them. Before opening the door, she looked at him again and threw herself into his arms, kissed him and said:

"You are going! Alas, you are going! . . . Go! Yes, I am yours forever! . . . Do you hear?"

Steps resounded in the house. Djemileh opened the door quickly.

"Go!" she murmured. She gave the young man a push and he found himself in a deserted alley. The wall had closed behind him.

Solitude did not calm him. On the contrary, the frenzy that had mastered him and swept him along at the sight of his cousin now took another turn and another form and did not diminish. It seemed to him that he had always loved Djemileh; that these few minutes were his whole life. He had not lived before; he only vaguely remembered what he had wanted, sought, planned, approved of an hour ago. Djemileh was everything, filled the universe, gave life to his being; without her he was nothing and could do nothing. It would have horrified him to desire or hope for anything but Djemileh even if he could have done so.

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

"What have I done?" he said bitterly. "I left! What a coward! Was I afraid? Am I afraid? Why did I leave? Where is she? To see her again! Oh, to see her again! But where? Never! Never will I see her again! I did not ask her this! I did not even have the courage to tell her I love her! She must despise me! What can she think of a wretch like me? My dear one! My Djemileh! She deserves a sultan at her feet, under her feet, a lord of the world! What am I? She will never love me!"

He hid his face in his hands and cried bitterly. But the memory of a heavenly music rose in his soul.

"She said to me: 'I am yours!' . . . Did she say it? Did she really say it? How did she say it? . . . I am yours! . . . Why? . . . Always? . . . Perhaps she did not mean what I think she did. . . . I give a meaning to it that was not there. . . . She only wanted to make me hear it. . . . Ah, how I suffer and how I wish I were dead! She wanted me to save her brother, nothing more! She wanted to distress me! She wanted to amuse herself with me. . . . Women are false! Very well! I hope she will be amused! Let her distress me! Let her torture me! If it pleases her, who can prevent her? Not I. No, indeed, I am her chattel, her plaything, the dust of her feet, whatever she wishes! Let her break me, she would do well! Whatever she wants is right! Ah! Djemileh! Djemileh!"

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

He returned home, pale and ill. His mother noticed it. She put her arms around him. He rested his head on her knees and stayed there most of the night without sleeping or speaking. Fever consumed him. The next day he was quite ill and lay in bed. A strange feebleness had overcome him and relaxed his limbs. He thought his end was near and he was content. He had an almost constant hallucination that he saw Djemileh. Sometimes, in the voice he remembered so well, she uttered the words that henceforth made up his very life: "I am really yours." Sometimes, and oftener, she cast a disdainful look at him which he had not seen, but which he was sure he well deserved. Then he was so unhappy he wished he could die.

He tried to think out ways for seeing the daughter of his uncle again. But his imagination was checked by impossibilities. Once, one time only, he had penetrated into the enemy's house by braving all. He did not know what to do. Could he risk destroying them both and more certainly her whom he loved? What would she think if she saw him again? Would she want him? Would she call him? What a joy to live where she lived, to fall on the ground that was trodden by her beloved feet, to expire in the holy air she breathed; that would be a supreme blessing. But suppose that in closing his eyes, wounded by a cruel sword or a bullet, he should encounter Djemileh's eyes and receive a

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

look of icy indifference, of scornful hate! That would be too much. No, he must never fall in that house.

Mohsen was sure only of one thing: that he was not loved. Why did he believe this? He was too much in love himself. The madness of love had seized him unawares, suddenly, brutally, completely; he did not understand what had happened to him. He kept recalling what Djemileh had said to him. Alas, the words, one by one, were cherished in his heart like pearls, but, hearing them, repeating them over and hearing them again, he did not understand them any better. He only knew that he had not been able to answer a single solitary word. He was very unhappy.

His mother saw him languishing. The poor child's chest troubled him, a steady heat consumed him. He was dying. All the neighbors knew of his condition, and as there was no explanation for such a sudden illness they all agreed that witchcraft had been exercised upon him and they wondered who had done it. Some said they knew the Muradziis had ordered it, others accused old Osman of being the murderer and of having paid a Jewish doctor for the spell.

It was evening, and quite late. For two days the young man had not spoken a word. His head was turned toward the wall, his arms lay relaxed on the bed. His mother had spread many amulets around him and hopelessly waited for him to expire. She was looking at him with hungry eyes when, suddenly, to the

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

great surprise of the poor woman, and almost frightening her, Mohsen abruptly turned his head toward the door and his expression changed; a glimmer of life illumined it. He listened. His mother heard nothing. He raised himself and said in a confident voice:

"She is leaving the house and is coming here!"

"Who, my son? Who comes here?"

"She, my mother, she comes! Open the door for her!" answered Mohsen in a loud voice. He was beside himself; a thousand flames sparkled in his eyes. Not knowing what she was doing, the old woman obeyed the imperious command and with a trembling hand opened wide the door. She listened; she heard nothing. She looked down the corridor; it was dark; she saw nothing. One minute, two minutes passed in this waiting that was anguish for her and full of certainty for him. Then a slight sound was heard; the door of the house opened; a stealthy, rapid step brushed over the flagstones; a form, at first indistinct, emerged from the shadows. It was a woman, and at the threshold of the room a veil fell. Djemileh rushed towards the bed and with a cry of joy Mohsen took her in his arms:

"You are here! It is you! You love me?"

"More than anything else!"

"Unhappy child," cried his mother, "this was what was killing him."

The two lovers remained in each other's arms and



## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

did not speak; they stammered; they were drowned in tears. They gazed at each other with undying passion, and like a flickering lamp into which oil is poured the soul of Mohsen came to life again and his body was revived.

"What is the meaning of this?" said the old woman. "Have you sworn your destruction and ours too? Won't your uncle become aware of Djemileh's flight? What will he do? What calamities will befall us? Child of misfortune, go back home! Leave us!"

"Never!" cried Mohsen. He got up out of bed, fastened his dress, tightened his belt, stretched his hand to the wall, took down his arms and put them on, loaded his gun, all in a second. Every trace of weakness had disappeared. If he had a fever, it was the fever of action. Enthusiasm shone on his face. Djemileh helped him to buckle the belt of his sword. Feelings like those of the young man animated her charming features. Just then old Mahomet, followed by two of his men, entered the room. Seeing his niece, who threw herself at his feet, kissing his hands, he was surprised and could not hide his emotion. His rough, haughty features contracted.

"They love each other," said his wife, pointing to the two children.

Mahomet smiled and stroked his moustache.

"May the dishonour be on my brother and his house!" he murmured.

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

For a moment he thought of throwing Djemileh out of the house and spreading it abroad that he had treated her like a woman of ill repute. This wrong would satisfy his hate. But he loved his son; he looked at him; he realized it was not easy to do things like this and contented himself with a moderate vengeance.

"Close the doors!" he said. "We will soon be attacked, and you women must load the guns!"

Djemileh had not been gone from her father's house a quarter of an hour before her absence was noted. She could not be at the fountain, it was too late; nor at a friend's, or she would have told her mother. Where was she? They feared some misfortune. For several days she had been sad and disturbed. What was the matter with her? The father, the brothers, the mother went about in the quarter. The street was deserted, not a sound was to be heard. Osman, guided by his instinct, stealthily approached Mahomet's house and, leaning close to the wall of the court, he heard talking in the house. They were piling stones against the door, getting their weapons ready and preparing to repel an attack.

"What attack?" thought Osman. "If it were the Muradziis, my brother would have warned me, for there we agree. He knows this very well. I would help him. If that is not it, I am—" He listened more attentively and unfortunately overheard these words:

"Djemileh, give me the rifle."

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

“She is there!”

It was his daughter's voice. A shiver went through him from the tip of his hair to the sole of his feet. Everything was clear. During the past days, when he and his sons had gloatingly told her Mohsen was dying, Djemileh had not said a word or expressed any joy, and he even remembered having reproached her. Now he understood. The unfortunate girl was in love with her cousin, and, horrible thought, she had even strayed so far as to betray her family, her father, mother, brothers, their antipathies and hates, to throw herself across the shreds of her reputation into the arms of a wretch. Osman had never dreamed he could be injured by such a cutting outrage. He remained as if glued to the spot, thunderstruck, more cruelly and painfully wounded by the sounds of these voices, an imperceptible vibration of air, than he ever could have been by lead or steel.

At first, the pain was so intense, the suffering so poignant, the humiliation so complete, so deep, that he could not think at all. He could not plan a revenge. But this numbness did not last long. His blood began to flow, his head cleared, his heart beat again, he suddenly had an idea, shook himself and went back home. He said to his wife and sons:

“Djemileh is a monster. She loves Mohsen and has fled to this dog of a Mahomet, I heard her voice in the courtyard of these people. You, Kerim, with three

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

of my men, go and knock at the door of these bandits; you will tell them that you want your sister instantly. You will make a lot of noise. They will parley and you will listen to them and answer them and drag the affair out. You, Serbaz, and you, Elem, with our five other soldiers, will take pickaxes and shovels and will follow me. We will silently attack the wall of these villains on the alley side. When we have dug a sufficiently large hole, we will enter. Now listen well to what I tell you. Repeat it to your men and force them to obey. In this corner here, at the head of my bed—do you see? To-morrow morning I shall have three heads: Mahomet's, Mohsen's and Djemileh's. Now, in God's name, to work!"

The inmates of Mahomet's house had barely completed their preparations for defence when there was a knocking at the door.

"This is the beginning," murmured the head of the family. He placed himself in front of his people in the hall leading to the entrance of the house. Behind him was his wife, holding ready another loaded gun. Mohsen was near him with his musket. Near Mohsen, leaning against him, was Djemileh, holding the pike of her lover; behind them, the three vassals armed with daggers. The garrison was not strong or well armed, but it was determined. No one trembled. The strongest feelings a heart can entertain dominated them; no cowardly sensation existed beside them; only

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

love and hatred, in an atmosphere of heroic fearlessness, without a thought of what life offered, or of the supposed bitterness of death, or of anything else.

They did not answer the first knock of the besiegers. Another avalanche of blows from muskets and blows from feet shook the door a second time and resounded through the house.

"Who knocks like that?" said Mahomet in a brusque voice.

"It is we, my uncle," answered Kerim. "Djemileh is with you; let her out!"

"Djemileh is not here," answered the old Afghan. "It is late; leave us in peace."

"We will force the door, and you know what will happen!"

"Without a doubt your heads will be broken and nothing more."

There was a moment of silence. Djemileh, leaning towards Mohsen, said to him softly:

"I hear a noise from the other side of the wall. Let me go into the court and find out what is happening."

"Go," said Mohsen.

The young girl went towards the place and listened a moment. Then calmly she returned to her place and said: "They are digging and will make a breach."

Mohsen reflected. He knew the wall was of plaster, quite thick, to be sure, but of little power of resistance.

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

Kerim had continued the parley with long intricate threats, to which Mahomet replied. His son interrupted and told him what he had just found out.

“Let us go up on the roof and finish it. We will fire down from up there and they will have their troubles taking us.”

“Yes, but in the end they will take us and we will not be avenged. Climb up on the roof and from there jump with Djemileh to the next roof, fly, reach the end of the street; jump down, and run, without stopping, to the other end of the town to our relative Jousef. He will hide you. Djemileh will be lost to her family. It will be days before they will know where you are and where you have hidden her. The faces of our enemies will be black with shame.”

Without answering, Mohsen threw his gun across his back and told the young girl what to do. He kissed his mother's hand and the two lovers hastily climbed the rude, narrow steps that led to the roof of the house. With infinite tenderness Mohsen supported his companion in flight. They jumped over a wall, ran across a roof, two, three, four roofs, and reached the opening where the narrow street wound past. He jumped down and received his beloved in his arms, for she did not hesitate a second to follow him. Then they went on. They were merged in the dark turnings of their way.

Meanwhile, Mahomet, pretending to be duped,



## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

continued to exchange insults and shouts with the assailants on the other side of the door whose object he now understood. The door, constantly battered by new assaults, gave way; the pile of boards fell with a great noise. But Mahomet and his men did not fire. Almost at the same moment a sufficiently large hole opened in the wall and the besieged were between two opposite bands of foes, as in a vise.

"I will not fire on my brother or the sons of my brother," cried Mahomet. "God save me from such a crime! By the salvation and blessing of the prophet, what is the trouble? Why this rage? What are you saying about Djemileh? If she is here, search! Take her away! Why do you disturb peaceful people and your relatives in the middle of the night?"

This plaintive language, so at variance with Mahomet's customary tone, astonished his listeners. To begin with, they were assured Djemileh was not there. Had they been mistaken? Uncertainty calmed them a little. Their fury was assuaged. Osman cried harshly:

"If Djemileh is not here, where is she?"

"Am I her father?" retorted Mahomet.

"Let us search!" Osman called to his people.

They scattered through the rooms, lifted the hangings, opened the chests and looked into the inmost recesses, but could find nothing. This failure and the look of profound innocence affected by Mahomet and his men increased their confusion.

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

"Son of my father," said Mahomet with an affectionate voice, "it seems that a great sorrow has overtaken you and I share your grief with you. What has happened to you?"

"My daughter has fled," answered Osman, "or she has been taken from me. In any case, she dishonours me."

"I share your grief with you," repeated Mahomet, "for I am your elder and her uncle."

This remark impressed Osman and, a little ashamed of the useless noise he had made, he took leave of his brother almost in a friendly way, followed by his people. Left alone, old Mahomet began to laugh; he had not only struck at his enemy's heart, he had fooled and baffled him as well. As for Osman, completely discouraged, not knowing what to make of it, he was in a transport of temper, which was increased by his powerlessness, and he returned home with his sons and his men, not to lie down, but to sit in a corner of his room, his two clenched fists against his forehead, seeking in the shadows of his mind some way to discover the traces of his daughter. The early dawn found him thus.

At this moment, one of his men, his lieutenant, his *naib*, entered the room and saluted him.

"I have found your daughter," he said.

"You have found her?"

"At least I think I am not mistaken. In any case, if

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

the woman I took for her is not she, I found Mohsen-Beg."

Osman's mind had a sudden revelation. He realized for the first time that when he entered his brother's house he had not seen his nephew. He had been so excited and so occupied in calming himself so as not to fail in his purpose that he had not noticed the most important things. He was secretly indignant with himself for his blindness, but, with an imperious gesture, he commanded the *naib* to continue his story. The latter, in order to maintain the equality in rank to which his birth entitled him, sat down and continued as follows:

"When we entered Mahomet-Beg's house, I looked at each of the assistants. This helps one to know exactly with whom one is dealing. Mohsen-Beg was not there. I was surprised. I did not think it natural that such a brave young man would stay away on a night when there was to be fighting. This strangeness gave me food for thought. I did not return home with you, but, going through the bazaar, circled around your brother's house. I asked the police guards if they knew about a young man such as I described, alone or followed by a woman. No one had seen any one like him until I questioned a man who not only answered "Yes" but added that the person whom he saw was precisely Mohsen-Beg, son of Mahomet-Beg of the Ahmedziis, and that he was accompanied, as I had told him, by

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

a woman. He pointed out the direction the two fugitives had taken and told me at what hour he had seen them. It was exactly the moment when we were beginning to force your brother's door. I continued my search, certain, from now on, that it was not in vain, and for several hours followed a road, left it, took another, questioned the night watchman, was mistaken, found the trail again, until finally, from far off, I caught sight of the two fugitives whom I was seeking.

"It was a deserted quarter in the midst of ruined houses. Mohsen supported his companion, who was worn out, and cast anxious, suspicious glances about him. I hid from him behind a piece of wall and from there I watched what he did. He was seeking a shelter, evidently, so as to be able to rest. He found what he wanted and descended into a cave, half fallen in, led his companion in there and in a few minutes came out alone. He took in the surroundings and, thinking he had not been seen, as I carefully hid myself, he covered up his hiding-place with some large stones and rejoined the woman in the cave. I stayed a few minutes to be sure he would not leave the place. He did not move. The dawn began to redden the sky. I have told you all. Now, do what you think wisest."

Osman had not interrupted the story. When the *nai'b* finished speaking, he got up and gave the order to rouse his sons and his men. All having been summoned,

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

the avengers started forth, led by the one who had found the lovers' retreat, and all were certain of finding them fast asleep at this hour, thinking themselves in perfect safety.

To have reduced them to the shelter of jackals and dogs, some unforeseen accident must have deprived them of the protection they had expected when they left the besieged home of Mahomet. The unhappy children, indeed, had had hard luck. They had reached, without mishap, the house of their relative Jousef, a long way from the one they had left. Djemileh, who was little used to long marches and was frail and delicate besides, was extremely tired, but would not admit it. She was comforted by the happiness of being near Mohsen and the hope of soon being in safety with him. But although he rapped at the door with the butt-end of his musket, after having first knocked more gently for a long time, he did not succeed in gaining admittance and he was seriously thinking of staving in the door when a neighbour called to him that Jousef-Beg and his family had left for Peshawar fifteen days before and would not return that year.

This was a thunderbolt for the fugitives. During the whole journey, Mohsen had walked behind Djemileh, his hand on the trigger of his musket, expecting to hear the enemy's footsteps each minute. He could not imagine how long his father could hold out and he was sure the house would be forced. He had no doubt

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

what would then happen, and his courage and gaiety were sustained by the certainty of an assured refuge where he could remain hidden with his treasure for weeks without running any risk.

But when his uncle failed him, he was stranded and did not know where to go. There was no place in the whole world, not even in the whole universe, where Djemileh could be sheltered from death. He knew in an anguish of body and soul that insults and vengeance were in pursuit of the passion of his life, the charming girl who loved him so tenderly and whom he loved unto death; that insults or death might momentarily touch this holy wonder; that his enemies were perhaps even now turning the corner of the very street where he stood with her, not knowing what would become of them. As he realized all this, he did not lose courage, but, feeling his courage weaken, he was surprised and braced himself. But his gaiety had vanished.

Not so Djemileh's. She looked at her lover and saw how pale he was.

"What is the matter with you?" she said. "Am I not with you? Isn't my life yours? If one of us dies, will not the other die too? Who can separate us?"

"No one," said Mohsen. "But for you, you, you, to be unhappy! You, wounded!"

At this thought he hid his face in his hands and cried bitterly. She gently removed his fingers, wet with



## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

tears, clenched against the brow and cheeks that she loved, and putting her arm around Mohsen's neck, she said:

"No! Oh, no! No! Do not think of me alone, think only of us both. As long as we are together, all is well! Let us hide! We must gain time! We must not let them catch us!"

"But what can we do?" cried Mohsen, stamping his foot. "Not a single resource! And your father is certainly pursuing us this very moment! He will find us, he will surely find us! Where shall we go? What will become of us?"

"Yes, where to go," thought Djemileh. "I do not know, but you will find a way, I am sure you will soon think of a way; because you are brave and do not tremble at anything, my dear, my dear Mohsen. You will save your wife!"

She kept holding him tightly. She withdrew her right arm from the young man's neck and fondled him and dried his tears. Either as a reaction against his weakness or from the magnetic influence that love has upon those it masters, Mohsen was suddenly himself again. His head cleared, and gently withdrawing from the loving embrace he looked calmly at Djemileh, became another man and said in a steady voice:

"This quarter is absolutely deserted and there are many ruins here. Let us look for a momentary shelter, a cave, if possible, where you can lie down and sleep.

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

There is only a slight chance that they will find us. During the day, I will try to go out cautiously and get something to eat. At the worst, we can fast until to-night, and during the twelve or fifteen hours ahead of us perhaps we will think of some good way of using the next night to get to some place of safety."

Djemileh agreed to the plan her young protector proposed and they started off. They soon came to the ruins. They climbed over several walls. Snakes and venomous beasts fled at their approach, but they never noticed them. They were suspicious and looked around them, but did not know they were discovered and did not feel the eyes of the spy upon them.

They soon came to the cave where Osman's *naib* had seen them enter. In an instant, Djemileh, who had pillowed her head on Mohsen's knees, fell into a deep sleep, a natural result of her youth and exhaustion, and for several minutes her lover did the same. But suddenly he found himself wide awake. An indefinable uneasiness banished even the appearance of fatigue. His blood pounded. He had a feeling of danger. He had too much to lose. He could not be too guarded, too alert, for any event. He looked at the sleeper tenderly, passionately, with a devotion that came from his inmost being, and then he gently raised Djemileh and placed her adored head on a clump of grass and went out to guard the surroundings.

He saw nothing. Day came quickly. Against the blue

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

horizon were defined, like a gold and green silhouette, the roofs of the houses and the leafy trees adorning the near-by courtyards. He lay in the grass to hide better and remained thus for quite a long while, perhaps an hour, surrounded by absolute stillness. Finally, he distinctly heard the footsteps of many people. He listened and heard whispers.

"There they are," came the swift thought. Nothing resembling fear tainted his courage, which was hard as steel.

He got on his knees and drew the long knife which he held securely in his hand. Hardly was he ready when a man crossed the wall. He was the *naib* of Osman-Beg, who was guiding the enemy. Mohsen rose swiftly, almost before the *naib* had seen him, struck him furiously on the head, cut through his blue, red-striped turban and killed him on the spot. Then he threw himself on another assailant who appeared at the *naib's* side. It was the eldest of his cousins. He battered him down with a vigorous sword-thrust and attacked his uncle himself, who only just had time to parry with his sword. Then the most unequal of fights began between Mohsen and the band who were after him.

But, without knowing it, he had two advantages over his adversaries. First, the rapidity, violence, and success of his attack had thrown them on the defensive and they were so astounded that they wondered

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

whether Mohsen really was alone. Then Osman-Beg had given the command to take him alive, so they could not strike him; and while his thrusts came fast, they were satisfied to crowd him and did not trust themselves to approach too near, counting on his exhaustion to bring him down. He was still far from this extremity. With each thrust to right and left, his strength seemed to increase. However, Osman-Beg's forecast might have proved right in the end. Exhaustion would have come to the brave fighter, but fortunately an unforeseen incident changed the outcome of the fray.

Mohsen, in killing the *naib*, wounding his cousin and striking many others, had pushed all his assailants in front of him, and these, not being able to hold their ground, continued to fall back so far that, without intending or expecting to do so, they all came out of the ruins together and reached the edge of the street. The population gathered to judge the thrusts with the intense interest that an affair of this kind excites in every country, but especially amongst a people as warlike as the Afghans. A very pronounced interest was shown by the crowd in this handsome, brave young man who, all alone, was holding so many adversaries at bay. They were not shocked that his enemies attacked in such disproportionate numbers; niceties of this kind are not of all times or places, and, in general, it is conceded best to kill one's enemy any way one

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

can. But they saw that Mohsen was valiant; they enjoyed watching him. Each of his audacious thrusts excited a quivering of enthusiasm and sympathy. They did nothing, however, to extricate him from his danger except to offer prayers aloud; with these the women, ornamenting the roofs, were especially prodigal.

At this moment a young man on horseback appeared. His blue turban with red stripes was of fine silk and the fringe fell elegantly to his shoulder. He had a short coat of cashmere, tightened at the waist by a jewelled belt, from which hung a magnificent sword, and his trousers were red. The harness of his horse, a true blue-blooded white Turkoman, was studded with gold, turquoise, pearls and enamels. Twelve military servants armed with shields, swords, daggers, pistols and a gun on the shoulder walked in front of the cavalier. He stopped suddenly with his men to see what was going on and was displeased. He frowned, his face became arrogant and terrible, and he shouted in a loud voice:

“Who are these men?”

“Ahmedziis,” answered a voice in the crowd, “and why Osman-Beg wants to kill the young man who has been trying to defend himself for a quarter of an hour, God knows!”

“But I do not know, and it seems too insolent that an accursed family should come and assassinate peo-

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

ple in a quarter that is not theirs and is mine! Stop! Osman-Beg! Give in, fall back, leave your victim, go away, or I swear on the tombs of all the saints you shall not leave here alive!"

As if these words were not peremptory enough, the cavalier brandished his sword and made his horse jump into the midst of the combatants. His servants grasped their shields, drew their swords and jostled Osman-Beg's men and, as the newcomers were more numerous, roughly separated them from Mohsen, who found himself suddenly protected by a living wall, vitally alive, and ready to deprive those who menaced him of their lives.

Osman-Beg at once took in the situation. He saw it was impossible to resist, and, disdaining all recrimination, he gave a sharp signal to his people, gathered them in and left, giving his new adversary a look full of hatred, defiance, and revenge to come.

Mohsen, unexpectedly freed from the strain of an unequal struggle and thinking of his loved one, instinctively moved to return with all speed to the place where he had hidden her. But she was at his side and handed him the gun he had left in the cave. It was the deed of a yielding and devoted wife to bring her husband a weapon in the midst of the fight, and it pleased the crowd and made an even more favorable impression on the young cavalier who had championed the



## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

weaker side. He saluted Mohsen with grave courtesy and said:

"Blessed be the Lord who brought me here in time!" And he pointed to the body of the dying *naib*. "You have a strong arm for your age!"

Mohsen smiled coldly. This compliment delighted him; he put his foot on the chest of his enemy with assumed indifference as if it had been a crushed snake, and, without noticing it further, answered:

"What is the noble name of Your Excellency, that I may thank you as I ought?"

"My name," answered the cavalier, "is Akbar-Khan, and I am of the tribe of the Muradziis."

Mohsen owed his life to the implacable enemy of his race, and this enemy added, raising his voice:

"My father is Abdullah-Khan, and you undoubtedly know that he is the favourite lieutenant of the all-powerful minister of His Highness, may God preserve him!"

He was not only a member of a hereditarily hostile race, but the son of the cruelest of the persecutors of his family, this man who had saved Mohsen and Djemileh and actually held them in his hands as tightly as a sparrow is held in the claws of a goshawk.

The son of Mahomet-Beg had thought he was saved, at least for a time, and his quick imagination even delightfully presented to him in a picture Djemileh

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

rested, calm, and happy. But the picture was rudely torn from him, and in its place appeared the hateful reality, painted in dark colours. Behind the lovers were the threatening uncle and his murderous band; if, by concealing their names and through the aid of a few lies, they succeeded in slipping away from Akbar-Khan, it would only be to fall back, in a few minutes or at most a few hours, into the peril that was certainly lying in wait for them. It was day; they could not hide. Not knowing where to find a refuge, they would be captured and lost. If they placed themselves, by means of some fraud, under Akbar-Khan's protection, and passed themselves off for persons other than themselves, they would surely perish. Osman-Beg would not lag in denouncing them and making them known, and then Akbar would not only kill them, but treat them as cowards and justly reproach them for having been afraid of him. Then what would become of Djemileh?

In his anguish Mohsen looked at her. A proud smile shone on the young girl's face. Her beautiful eyes suggested a definite idea. She did not say a word, but he understood her.

"I do not know your father," he said to Akbar, "but who has not heard his name? Will it please you not to withdraw your hand from my head? Then lead me to him and I will speak to both of you."

The young chief made a sign of consent. Mohsen

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

walked beside his horse, with Djemileh behind him. The soldiers were in the lead again, all the Muradziis protecting the two Ahmedziis in their midst. Unknown to all, they crossed the bazaar and the big square and arrived at the citadel, went through the gate, which was crowded with soldiers, servants, and dignitaries, and, having passed through two narrow streets, arrived at the palace which was occupied by Abdullah-Khan. All the company entered.

Akbar said a few words to a Beloutje slave, who hastened ahead of him into the inner courtyard. As the chief was dismounting, the slave returned, accompanied by a maidservant who respectfully invited Djemileh to follow her into the harem. It was a most proper and polite offer, and in arranging this reception for the wife of his guest, whom he had not even appeared to notice, Akbar acted as was to be expected of a man in his position.

Mohsen, with a wave of his left hand, directed the young woman to accept the invitation, and Djemileh went towards the low door leading to the women's apartment. She was hardly inside the narrow hall when Mohsen suddenly rushed after her and caught up with her at the moment the servant was lifting her inner veil, took her hand, swept her along and ran with her, throwing aside two servants who tried to stop him, and hurried into a small garden full of flowers, in the centre of which was a white marble

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

pool with a fountain. Mounting three steps which led to a hanging of red-striped silk, he raised this and entered a spacious room, and seeing three ladies there seated in a corner on a rug, one of them old, and the others very young, he prostrated himself before the old one, whom he supposed to be the mistress of the house. Djemileh did the same, and, taking hold of the hem of her dress, cried out:

“Protection!”

The one he implored, as well as her two companions, showed great astonishment. They first looked at the bold invader of their sacred place and then at his companion. Although they were astonished, they were not hostile. The handsome face of Mohsen was not that of a madman, still less that of an insolent person, and Djemileh, who had cast aside her veil, was so pretty, so dignified, so noble in her whole bearing that compassion, sympathy, and affection arose in the eyes of those whom they implored for help and who had not summoned strength to say a word when, through two doors, Abdullah and Akbar entered the apartment.

The first, an old man with a sad, preoccupied air, came in by chance. He had come into his wife's room to see his daughter and his daughter-in-law. The other, amazed by Mohsen's unexpected behaviour, ran after him to punish what he had a right to consider outrageous. Seeing his father standing at the

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

door and Mohsen on the rug, prostrated at his mother's feet, he stopped.

"What does this mean?"

"Madame," said Mohsen, continuing to hold the garment of his protectress with his two hands, "madame, I am an Afghan, I am a noble, I love this woman who is at my side; her father is my father's enemy; we have eloped; they want to kill us; I am ready to die, but I am not ready for her to die or to be maltreated or harmed. . . . Madame, they follow us, they spy upon us. Your noble son saved us just now, and if he leaves us we will surely perish. Save us!"

The lady did not answer, but looked beseechingly at her husband, and the two young women did the same—the one at her father and brother, the other at her husband. But Abdullah frowned, and, sitting down in a corner of the room, gave vent to these bitter words:

"What do these wild pranks mean? Ah, since when was an Afghan, a noble, so bewildered through fear as not to think himself safe in my house? From the moment when my son protects you, what more can you want? Who would have dared to touch you?"

"You!" answered Mohsen, looking him straight in the eye.

"I?" cried the old chief.

He shook his head disdainfully and continued:

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

"You are mad, but, since thoughtlessness is no excuse for such temerity as yours, you will be punished."

Abdullah was about to clap his hands to call his people, when Mohsen again appealed to the old lady, saying:

"Your husband shall not touch me! He shall not chastise or insult me; you will save me from him, madame. I am Mohsen, son of Mahomet Ahmedzii, and this is my cousin, the daughter of my uncle Osman. Your relatives killed two of my kinsmen not three years ago. Here am I, and there she is. You can easily kill us. Will you do it?"

As he pronounced these last words, Mohsen stood up very straight and Djemileh with him. They held each other's hands and looked fixedly at Abdullah.

The latter was tightly grasping the handle of his knife, and his hollow eyes promised no good, but the old lady said to him:

"My lord, hear the truth! If you harm these children who have implored my help while holding the hem of my garment, you will lose your honour before men, and in their eyes your face, which now shines like silver, will be black!"

Abdullah did not look convinced. It was evident that the most vindictive feelings flamed in his fierce, surly heart, which was hungry for the prey that had fallen within its reach. Although other considerations



## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

arose and held him back, he could hardly control himself and might have given in at any moment.

According to the customs of the Afghans, a war-like, fierce, bloody people, but singularly romantic, a mortal enemy cannot be attacked from the moment he has rushed into the harem of his adversary and obtained the protection of the women. Honour decrees that the suppliant becomes inviolable, and his enemy cannot harm him without being considered infamous. There are many well-known instances of the power this custom has exerted over men to whom otherwise it is exceedingly difficult to appeal. But honour compels them to do even more, and if fugitive lovers appeal for help to any man, however much a stranger to their cause, this man, if he prides himself on his valour and generosity, cannot refuse his help and is obliged to support those who have thought well enough of him to choose him as their champion. Under these circumstances, a previous enmity does not affect their duty; it must cease and be forgotten, at least for a while, and the greater the danger for taking part in the runaway lovers' quarrel the stricter is the obligation. In India, Persia, and the country of Kabul, Kandahar, and Herat, it is known that many quarrels and most of the fights between Afghan families and tribes, even the bloodiest hereditary feuds, have begun through the help given and continued to unfortunate lovers.

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

All this is true. Nevertheless, to save the man you hate, once he is in your grasp, to succour and forgive, at the dictate of honour, the man you detest, is not easy, and when you are obliged to submit, you hesitate. There was silence for some time in Abdullah Khan's harem. He felt a thousand serpents gnawing at his heart and, although he realized the necessity of ejecting them, he could not do so. As for Akbar, he would have been willing to stab Mohsen, but it was not difficult for him to restrain himself. The affection and esteem he had conceived for this man, after seeing him hold his own so valiantly against the bloodthirsty crowd in the deserted quarter, remained before his eyes, and he listened readily to his mother's voice, understood and welcomed the looks of his wife and sister, and soon fell into accord with the dictates of his honour which decreed that even to touch the finger-tips of the two Ahmedziis, intending harm, would be disgraceful and an unending shame to his house. But what he thought did not count. He could not give an opinion until his father was convinced. Abdullah looked hard at Mohsen and Djemileh, and they returned his look. They did not implore, they asked for nothing, they had a right over him and they were exercising it. Only nobles are entitled to this right—base souls know nothing of it. This was what Abdullah read in the eyes of the two captives.

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

At least, that is what he understood. He rose, walked over to them and said:

“You are my children!”

He kissed them on the forehead, and they respectfully kissed his hands and the hands of the chief's wife, kneeling before her. The young women took Djemileh passionately in their arms, and Akbar was the first to greet Mohsen in the grand and gracious manner, the privilege of the flower of his nation. The young Ahmedzii returned his greeting with deference, as if to an older brother, and went out with him, first bowing to the ladies of the harem, where the strictest propriety did not permit him to stay after he had obtained what he sought.

Akbar led his new friend to one of the rooms of the palace where he had *kaliens* and tea brought and repeated to Mohsen that he should consider himself as in his own home and freely use whatever was around him. But the precise and elegant way in which the young Muradzii carried out the ceremony showed that he was performing a duty and priding himself on doing it well, rather than acting spontaneously. Mohsen understood this, and, as he was of the same mind as his host, it was not difficult for him to respond proudly with demonstrations of appreciation and make it understood that only the utmost urgency compelled him to beg for the protec-

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

tion which he never would have sought for himself alone. Throughout all the solemn demonstrations of mutual devotion, the protector and the protected each recognized that the course of their former enmity continued unchanged and intact. However, they talked freely, and Mohsen narrated everything that had happened since yesterday. He was silent about what directly concerned his love, and in speaking of Djemileh called her "his house"; while Akbar, in his questions and remarks, avoided all allusions to the young girl, although the long conference concerned her alone.

Meanwhile, a priest had come to the palace and asked to speak with Abdullah-Khan. He was brought in to the chief, who bowed to him respectfully and asked him to be seated, designating the most distinguished place. After the exchange of compliments, and when tea had been served and then carried away, the priest collected his thoughts for a moment, preparatory to explaining the object of his visit. He was a man of about fifty with a handsome face, a kindly expression, and a sallow colouring, emphasized by the white turban.

"Your Excellency," said this personage, "my name is Molla-Nur-Eddin, and I am a native of Ferrah. My profession tells you that I seek peace and harmony everywhere, and that is why I accepted a mission from Osman-Beg Ahmedzii to you. If it

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

succeeds, the probable consequences of a grievous misunderstanding can be averted."

"Molla," answered Abdullah-Khan, "I am a peaceful man myself, and only ask to live on friendly terms with the lord whose name you mention. Unfortunately, there is more than one obstacle between his family and mine, and I should like to know with which you are concerned now."

"About the last encounter," answered Molla-Nur-Eddin. "A man without any manners penetrated into the sacred rooms of Osman-Beg's house and carried away one of its principal ornaments. In the well-known generosity of your soul, you have given refuge to this evildoer, and Osman-Beg, in acquainting you with the unworthiness of his adversary, which is surely not known to you, does not doubt for an instant that you will deliver up to him the guilty one so that he can be justly punished."

"As a matter of fact," answered Abdullah-Khan, coldly, "the details Your Holiness has given me are entirely new to me and really you have opened my eyes. They have impudently lied to me. I thought Mohsen-Beg was the nephew of His Excellency Osman-Beg, and I could not see why an alliance between two such close branches of one family was forbidden. I ask you to pardon my fault, Molla."

"Your Excellency is not aware then that the two

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

brothers Osman and Mohammed do not live in perfect understanding?"

"I do not remember whether I knew it or not," answered Abdullah, scornfully. "The Ahmedziis are a troublesome people and there is no end to their quarrels. For the time being, if I am to believe what you have had the kindness to tell me, Osman detests his brother Mohammed and his son; he does not desire a union of the two families, follows his nephew to cut his throat and his daughter to assassinate her, and Mohsen flees to me and asks refuge of the Muradziis. You will concede, Molla, that these people are worthy of concern."

Here Abdullah shook his head, delighted with his statement and with the scorn with which he had overwhelmed his hereditary enemies. But the Molla was not intimidated by his sarcastic tone and replied with composure:

"No doubt the young girl will die and her accomplice with her. That is not the point. Osman-Beg only wants to know if you will consent to deliver up these fugitive slaves or whether you mean to defend them; that is solely what I have come to ask you."

"Let us suppose," said Abdullah, leaning towards the priest confidentially, "that I am not far from complying with your wishes, what will I gain from it? May I question you on this point, Molla?"

"Assuredly, if Your Excellency consents to give



## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

me the guilty pair I promise you that Osman-Beg's entire family will renounce their old feelings in regard to the Muradziis. The sons will enter your service without pay, and as the father knows that you are seeking an instructor to teach your slaves military discipline he will be that instructor and you can count upon him day and night. I need only tell you that Osman-Beg is ready to take every possible oath on the holy book as a guarantee of his faithfulness."

"I highly regard your propositions and they are very advantageous for me," cried Abdullah-Khan, "but if I reject them what will happen?"

"I can describe it to you accurately," answered the Molla; "but a visitor is arriving and you will know at once what to expect. You will know it more completely and exactly than if a poor man like me were to try and convince you."

At this moment, in the midst of a crowd of servants and in all the pomp of magnificent trappings, the chief doctor of the Prince of Kandahar entered the courtyard, an important personage because of the favour he enjoyed from the master. By race he was not an Afghan, but only what is called a Kizzilbash, descended from Persian colonists, analogous to a bourgeois. These people are esteemed not for their birth, but for their riches and their talents, when there is need for them. This one, called Gulam-Ali,

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

was received with the distinction to which his position at court entitled him. Besides, he was a friend of Abdullah-Khan's.

"Well," said the latter, after the demands of etiquette had been complied with and compliments were being exchanged, "the Molla tells me that you have come to advise me?"

"Heaven forbid!" said the doctor. "How could I be so impertinent to one who is wiser than I? Is it true that you have taken in a malefactor called Mohsen?"

"Mohsen-Beg Ahmedzii is in my house. Is it of him Your Excellency wishes to speak?"

"Precisely. You know that His Highness the Prince (may God prolong his days!) is a mirror of justice?"

"Of justice and generosity, who can doubt it?"

"No one. But the Prince has just sworn that he who prevents Osman-Beg from punishing his daughter and nephew will be killed, his house pillaged, and his goods confiscated."

"The Prince took such an oath?"

"I affirm it on my head."

"Why did he decide so quickly?"

"You will learn. The Prince has a sick child in the harem. He swore, yesterday evening, in order to obtain the health of the loved one and to calm the mother, that he would grant the first request that the

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

first person he met this morning asked him. Fate arranged that this person should be Osman-Beg. You know the Prince keeps his promises.”

“Especially that kind,” murmured Abdullah-Khan in consternation.

He looked at the Molla and looked at the doctor and was very much embarrassed. The Prince of Kandahar was not wicked or tyrannical, but he tenderly loved his wives and children, and, since he had made a vow to drive out the sickness from his harem, he would not go back upon it for anything in the world. Besides, Abdullah took into account the magnificence of his palace, the beauty of his hangings and rugs, the well-known plenty of his chests, and he saw that there was not an extenuating circumstance in his favour if, through inopportune rebellion, he should fall under the ban of confiscation. The more he thought, the more perplexed he became, and his two questioners, by their silence, were leaving him free to think it over, hoping he would come to a wise decision. Finally, Abdullah-Khan raised his head and called peremptorily:

“Have my son, Akbar, come here!”

In a moment, Akbar entered, bowed and stood near the door.

“My son,” said Abdullah, in a drawling, humble voice, quite different from his usual accents, “it pleases the Prince (may the virtues of His Highness

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

be rewarded on earth and in heaven!), it pleases the magnificent Prince to command me to expel Mohsen. The vagabond has to be delivered to his uncle, who will treat him as it seems he deserves, as well as the other guilty person! All that the Prince commands is right. I will immediately go to His Highness, in order to receive his commands, and ask His Sovereign Highness to permit me to do these things without blackening my reputation. As for you, my son, guard the house well during my short absence. Watch that these scoundrels do not escape! Watch with care, my son! You well know what a terrible calamity their flight would be! If they should reach the country they might never be caught! Have you understood me, my son?"

Akbar bowed and crossed his arms on his chest.

Abdullah continued to speak, addressing the Molla and the doctor.

"Do not be surprised at the positive orders I am giving him. Youth is not intelligent and is giddy. Not for anything in the world would I wish a man condemned by His Highness to escape merited punishment, especially through any negligence of mine."

The two spectators were both charmed and edified by what they had heard and seen and wished to take leave of Abdullah, but he detained them.

"No!" he said. "It is not proper for you to leave me. It might be said later that I had secretly spoken

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

to Mohsen, and many other things might be said. Innocence and loyalty must not be exposed to suspicion. Please, both of you, be so kind as to accompany me to the Prince."

This request was readily granted, and the three personages left the courtyard together, mounted their beautiful horses and, surrounded by their respective suites, soon arrived at the palace, where they were shown into the presence of the Prince.

The Prince received his lieutenant with his customary kindness. While the interview lasted, and it was long because Abdullah used all his power, wit, and intelligence to render it interminable, the following was happening at his house.

Akbar returned to the apartment where Mohsen was and said:

"The Prince commands that you be surrendered to your enemies. My father cannot defy him openly, but he will defend you with a ruse. We will mount our horses without loss of time and leave the town and reach the country. To-morrow will be to-morrow and we will see what to do then."

"Let us go!" answered Mohsen, rising. But he had a heavy heart. For the last hour, he had thought Djemileh safe from all ordeals. He chatted with his host and outwardly kept the cold look of a warrior, but behind the mask of his expression he was dreaming. All the fires of joy, all the fires of love possessed

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

his being. When one loves, one does nothing else but love. Across and through the golden web of love, the real thoughts are woven. Whatever is said about anything else sounds like mere words. You pay no attention to it, for it does not concern you. If you are interested, it is because in some secret way it concerns your love. Outside of your love, what is there? What can there be? What joy, what ecstasy to give one's self entirely without reserve to this! Dreams, hopes, desires, fears, profound terrors, sudden bravery, infinite certitude, snatches of hell, endless, flowery vistas, brilliant with sunshine, leading to paradise—all is love and whole worlds are contained within the beloved one. All else is nothing, less than nothing, and is seen through a veil of profound contempt. That is the way Mohsen felt.

But at this moment he had to pass from the light, with its few moments of poignant happiness, back into the shade where he had walked since the day before. The happy time had gone. In the shadows he had to begin again climbing the stony road, rough with perils. But what he was feeling was still love, love spurred on by suffering, more superb, prouder and more powerful and undying, nourished on bitterness, but preferring this pain to all other blessings. Besides, there was nothing of the bitterest, hardest, most unforgivable of all pains that destiny can impose—there was no question of separation or absence.



## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

It was not easy to convince the ladies of the harem of this urgent necessity. Khadidjeh, Akbar's mother; Amineh, his sister, and Alieh, his wife, cried and wept, but time was pressing. The affection they felt for Djemileh helped the ladies to understand how precious the minutes were, and, in spite of their sobs and cries, they allowed the young outlaw to tear herself from their arms and follow Akbar, who led her to her lover.

The horses had been hurriedly fetched and saddled. Akbar, Mohsen, and Djemileh got into their saddles, a dozen soldiers did the same, and the cavalcade, walking their horses, took a roundabout way to one of the fortress gates which led to the country. They had decided to put the guards to rout, if they tried to stop them, but the latter never thought of such a thing, and, once outside, Akbar galloped his horse and his companions followed suit.

For two hours they did not slacken their pace, even long enough for the horses to get their breath. These latter were of the good northern race, and their long gait and steady going helped them to cover much ground. Naturally, no one spoke. Judging, however, that they had gone far enough and that pursuit was impossible, since no one in town knew what direction they had taken, Akbar reined in his horse and discreetly kept far enough away from the two lovers for them to talk freely to each other. He acted as guide;

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

some of the horsemen were at his side, some behind as a rear-guard, others dispersed about, and all kept watching the horizon as they rode along at their leisure. Mohsen and Djemileh were virtually alone.

"Have you any regrets?" said the young man.

"Why?"

"To have loved me, sought me, followed me?"

"You would have died if I had not come. You were dying."

"It might have been over by now and you would have been peacefully sitting in your home, beside your mother, surrounded by your people."

"And you would be dead," continued Djemileh. "I would have seen you all the days of my life; before my eyes, in my heart, unable to revive you for one single second, with remorse and sorrow, ashamed of myself, cowardly, false and odious to those who knew of my crime, the murderess of my love, a traitress to the master of my soul. What are you saying? Can you imagine anything better for me than I have? Mohsen, my life, my eyes, my only thought! Perhaps you think I have not been happy since last night? But, think of it, I have not left you! I have been with you all the time, belonged to you! Every one knows I belong to you! I can belong to you only! They speak of danger, but I am here with you, at your side, close to you! The greater the danger, the nearer I am, the closer, the more merged in you! Do not tremble; if I were not here

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

you would be afraid of nothing! Why do you want to tear from your being the fragment that is in you, that is I, that cannot live or die without you?"

Beauty is noble; passion and love are more noble and beautiful. The most beautiful idol ever imagined or created by a workman never attained the perfection of a face expressing the divine inspiration of devoted love. Mohsen was thrilled as he heard Djemileh speak these words and gazed at her while she said them. She transported him with her into that flaming sphere where the past and the future vanish before the present. In this way, these children, who were so strangely protected, pursued by active, furious hate, betrayed by chance and unable, save for a miracle, to escape the narrow circle that was tightening about them to their destruction, these lovers soared together to heights of such happiness as even the most fortunate men can never attain.

They were in one of those moments when, through happiness, the mind is more alert and keener than it normally is. Then, although all absorbed in one's beloved, nothing passes unnoticed—everything leaves a mark on the heart and memory. The form and colour of every pebble one sees remains fixed forever in one's memory. One will always see, and never forget to the end of one's life, the swallow quickly flying across the sky at the moment that the voice of the adored one rings in one's ears. No! Mohsen would never lose the

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

picture of the sun sinking at his right behind a clump of trees, as Djemileh tenderly said to him:

“Why do you look at me like that?”

He answered:

“Because I adore you!”

And she added, with a ravishing look:

“You think so?”

Just then Mohsen noticed that Djemileh’s sleeve had a blue shadow, and in his rapture this was printed with fire in his memory.

Meanwhile, in the palace of Kandahar, in the house of Abdullah-Khan, in the house of Mahomet-Beg and at Osman’s, everything was in confusion owing to the two lovers. The two brothers, each followed by his men, had met in the bazaar, and Mahomet, exasperated at not knowing the fate of his son, attacked first. Some passers-by took part; gunshots and sword-thrusts were exchanged. The merchants, as usual, especially the Hindu merchants, cried out as if in distress, and one might have thought from the noise of the volleys and the clatter of arms, and especially the shrill shrieks, that the town was being sacked. However, no one was killed, and when men from the police court succeeded in separating the combatants and restoring each to his own side, it was found that the two parties had barely scratched each other. But the meeting was not without its consequences. It spread the whole affair abroad. It was known all over town that Mohsen

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

Ahmedzii had eloped with his cousin Djemileh, that the Muradziis had given them refuge but that the Prince had ordered the guilty ones to be surrendered to the offended father. There was a great difference of opinion about the affair. Some offered their services to Mahomet; according to them, a man of honour must always help and protect lovers; others thought that at bottom this was a continuation of the quarrel between the Ahmedziis and Muradziis, and since Mahomet and his son were in league with the latter they were betraying their family. Reasoning this way, they espoused the cause of the real and faithful Ahmedzii, Osman-Beg. Some, though indifferent to the cause itself, were indignant at the intervention of the Prince. They considered that he had no right at all to mix in a quarrel that did not concern him, much less to command a noble Afghan to surrender his guests. So they took Mahomet's side. But a considerable number were on Osman's side solely for the fun of fighting. This side had the majority. The city was suddenly a prey to a great commotion. The Hindus, Persians, Jews, all the quiet business people, closed their shops and assembled in the courtyards of the mosques, groaning mournfully that business was lost forever. The women of the lower class climbed up on the roofs where they were heard lamenting the future misery of their little families. The priests gravely visited the principal houses to preach peace, recommend modera-

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

tion and praise the advantages of forbearance—a state of mind that no one had ever heard of in this country. Thus things were going among these peaceful people. Meanwhile, more or less compact groups, stronger or weaker troops, people on foot and people on horseback with the blue, red-striped turban tightly folded around the brow, the tightened belt, the shield on the arm, the gun on the shoulder, the alert eye and the fierce beard, passed each other in the bazaar and jostled the passers-by. All were ready to jump at one another's throats. But they did nothing. They were waiting for leaders, waiting to be organized; uncertainty was in the air; resolved to fight, they promised themselves the pleasure and honour of battle, but they needed a recognized chief and a plan. This state of affairs may last for two or three days, and then everything explodes. That is the way it usually is.

The Prince was having a friendly conference with Abdullah-Khan, the priest, Molla-Nur-Eddin and the doctor Gulam-Ali, when the police judge of the city, much upset, came to tell His Highness what was going on. The priest and the doctor were inwardly satisfied to see things take this turn, provided it would hurry the affair to a conclusion. As for Abdullah-Khan, he was dismayed. It was more than he had expected. An insurrection would not suit him at all, and as the Prince was impressed by the story of the chief of police, he foresaw that if the two lovers were not found



## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

in his house the sovereign would be much more enraged than he would have been without the riot. He had calculated in an involved but sensible way that in giving refuge to Mohsen and his companion he would acquire a reputation for generosity and would have the pleasure of giving a rude knock to some, if not all, of the Ahmedziis by facilitating the flight of his protégés. He never intended to confess his part, and only his son, Akbar, would be compromised. The Prince would have been in a temper for several days, and then a gift would have calmed him and Akbar would have remained in favour. But his calculations had failed. Abdullah-Khan would be face to face with an affair of State when the Prince heard the truth. He was to be feared. Abdullah-Khan had to take a stand. He took it on the spot.

Till then, there had been no doubt about extraditing the young people; it had only been a question of fighting and sifting the details regarding the manner of the extradition, and he had dwelt so emphatically on his own interests and been so meticulous that the conversation had lasted two full hours. As the Prince did not meet with any resistance from his favourite and as many jokes were cracked during the interview, he was amused and not impatient—he was quite unconcerned whether Mohsen and Djemileh fell into their judge's hands a half hour sooner or later. In the end, however, it had been decided that Abdullah-Khan should

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

purely and simply hand the guilty ones over to the Prince without knowing what His Highness intended to do; and his inward conviction was able to tell him that, placed under the august protection, they would be comfortable and in safety. A messenger was then sent to the home of the favourite. Just as the chief of police was finishing his story of the occurrence in the town, the messenger came back, saying that all had fled, Akbar, Mohsen, and Djemileh, and that no one knew where they had gone.

Abdullah-Khan did not allow his master the time to become angry. He gravely spoke:

"Surely my insolent son (may the curse of God be upon him!) was foolishly afraid of dishonouring his family, and, without relying on the kindness of Your Highness, he took the two scoundrels away with him. Happily I know where to catch them. They are in my tower at Rudbar, four hours from here, in the mountains."

He took a ring from his finger, gave it to the chief of police and said:

"Send some messengers at once with my equerry, whom you will find below. Have him give this ring to my son, Akbar, and I will write an order to deliver the prisoners to your people. In this way the wrong will be righted and the city will be at peace again."

Abdullah spoke so clearly and so to the point that there was nothing to be indignant about. No one

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

doubted the good faith of the man who at that moment was really very sincere. He had decided to betray and hand over the young people. He would have preferred not to yield this point, but propriety and diplomacy forced him to silence the qualms of his pride and he did so. A man who in any way directs the interests of others necessarily loses a large part of his delicacy of feeling, if not all of it. A courtier lives by concessions, evasions, half measures of all kinds. He never does as well as he would like to do, and even if he succeeds in the perfect realization of his ambitions he no longer desires them. Abdullah-Khan was not at all concerned about two victims more or less, though he would have liked to harm the Ahmedziis. This could not be accomplished at the moment without too serious consequences. So he gave it up. As for his honour, he promised to make up this check by increased haughtiness. He consoled himself by thinking that nobody was strong enough to make him blush upon whom he could not avenge himself within an hour.

The end of this story is approaching. The envoys of the chief of police reached the tower with great dispatch in the middle of the night. In the light of the full moon, they saw a low, square building pierced by a narrow door and several singular-looking loop-holes, on a projection of rock, half way up a bleak hill. Nothing could have been more gloomy or tragic.

The messengers dismounted and their leader knocked

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

loudly to have the door opened. All were asleep. A soldier of the garrison came to the entrance and undid the iron bolts of the door. He was shown the seal and the letter. He said nothing, and without hesitating surrendered and called his companions, who showed no more resistance than he. But the parleys and the comings and goings awakened Akbar. The young chief appeared on a landing of the indoor stairs. The stairs were steep. Akbar towered above the heads of those to whom he spoke roughly:

“What does this noise mean? And you, my men, why do you permit these strangers to enter?”

“They are people sent by His Highness. They brought a letter and a ring from your father. We must give up the prisoners.”

Akbar asked:

“Did my father give this order?”

“He and no other! Here is his ring and here is his letter, I tell you.”

“Then Abdullah-Khan is a dog and I have no father!”

Saying this, he discharged his two pistols into the men who were assembled in front of him. One fell, and they fired back at him, but did not reach him. He grasped his sword. At that moment, Mohsen and Djemileh appeared beside the young man.

“Ahmedzii,” he shouted, “you will see that the men of my tribe are not cowards!”

## *The Lovers of Kandahar*

He seized his gun and fired. The aggressors shrieked with rage and dashed into the assault. Mohsen fired too. Djemileh already held Akbar's weapon and loaded it. Then she did the same for her husband, and for a quarter of an hour she continued calmly to do this. All of a sudden she raised her hand to her heart and tottered—a bullet had pierced her chest. At the same instant, Akbar rolled at her feet, mortally struck in the temple.

Mohsen threw himself upon Djemileh, raised her, embraced her, and their lips met. They both smiled and both fell; for a new discharge had struck the young man, and their enraptured souls passed on together.





*The War of the Turkomans*



## *The War of the Turkomans*



WAS named Ghulam-Hosain after my grandfather whom my parents always addressed as Aga, which means "my lord." They called me Aga out of respect for the head of the house, as they did not want his name to be lightly pronounced. That is how I and a host of my compatriots answer to the name of Aga, because they, too, were named

after their grandfathers, either Ali, Hasan, Mahomet or something else. So I am Aga. When fortune favoured me and I had a fairly clean garment and some *shahis* in my pocket, I called myself Beg. Aga-Beg is not bad. Unfortunately, I was usually so unlucky that the title of Beg often vanished before my beggarly appearance. Then I became Baba-Aga—Uncle Aga. I made the best of it. I admit I had no control over the

## *The War of the Turkomans*

circumstances which led me to visit the tomb of the Imams in the holy city of Meshed, to eat the food given out at the Mosque, as often as I could. At such times it seemed fitting to call myself Meshedi, pilgrim of Meshed. This is appropriate for a sedate, serious, and holy man. So I have the good fortune to be known either as Baba-Meshedi-Aga, or, preferably, Meshedi-Aga-Beg. But God disposes of everything as he pleases.

I was born in a little village of Khamseh, a province bordering on Azerbaijan. My village is situated at the foot of the mountains, in a charming little valley, where many murmuring streamlets, bubbling with joy, run between the tall grasses and jump over the polished stones. Willow groves along the banks almost choke the streams. Their foliage is so bright and green that it is a joy to look at them, and the crowds of birds nesting in them gladden one's heart. There is nothing more delightful than to sit under their cool shade and enjoy a good *kalian* full of fragrant smoke. They grew a great deal of wheat at home. We also had rice-fields and dwarf cotton whose delicate stems were carefully sheltered from the summer heat by castor-oil plants, planted at intervals amongst them. Their wide leaves formed parasols over the white flakes of their neighbours. Abdul-Hamid-Khan, a rich and prominent *Moustofi*, a councillor of state of Teheran, collected the revenues of the village. He

## *The War of the Turkomans*

protected us so carefully that we did not fear the Governor of Khamseh or any one else. We were perfectly happy.

As for me, I admit that working in the fields did not appeal to me. I infinitely preferred savouring the grapes, apricots, melons and watermelons to growing them. However, when I was barely fifteen, I adopted a profession much more pleasing to me than the ways of the peasantry. I became a hunter. I brought down the partridges, francolins and hazel-hens. I hunted gazelles and roebuck in the mountains. Once in a while I killed a hare; a waste of powder and difficult to sell, as it has the bad habit of living on carcasses and no one likes to eat it. Gradually I wandered as far as the forests of Ghylan. There I learnt from the clever marksmen how to hit my prey every time. This gave me the same confidence they had, to lie in wait for lions and panthers. These are fine animals and their skins sell well. I might have been extremely happy with my lot, enjoying my calling and earning enough money, of which, naturally, I never spoke either to my father or my mother, when unfortunately I suddenly fell in love, and everything was spoiled. God willed it!

I had a little fourteen-year-old cousin called Leila. I loved to meet her, and I met her very often. We had a great many things to talk about, and as we did not like to be interrupted, we chose an exquisite re-

## *The War of the Turkomans*

treat under the trees where the willows were thickest along the principal stream. We used to linger there for hours, unaware of the passing of time. At first I was very happy. When I was not with Leila, I thought of her constantly and became so impatient and anxious that I ran from place to place to find her. That is how I discovered a secret that thrust me into the depths of misery. I saw that I was not the only man to receive her favours.

She was so candid, lovely, good, and tender that I did not suspect her of infidelity for an instant. Such a thought would have killed me. Nevertheless, I was hurt to find that others could take up her time, amuse and distract her. I deliberated whether I should humble myself and confide my sorrow to her, and, after having decided not to complain, I told her everything.

“See here, daughter of my uncle,” I cried, weeping hot tears, “my life is waning. In a few days they will carry me to the cemetery. You converse with Hasan, talk to Kerim and laugh with Suleiman, and I am almost certain you gave Abdulla a smack. I know well there is no harm in it, for they are all your cousins, like me, and you cannot forget the promises you made to love me alone and do not wish to hurt me. But with all this I suffer, I breathe my last, I am dead, I am buried; you will not see me again. Oh, Leila, my dear, my heart, my treasure, pity your slave, he is so extremely miserable!”



## *The War of the Turkomans*

In pronouncing these words I wept harder. I burst out screaming. I threw off my cap and beat my head with my fists, and then I rolled on the ground.

Leila was much moved at the sight of my despair. She fell on my neck, kissed me on the eyes, and said: "Forgive me, my light, I was wrong. But I swear by all that is most sacred, by Ali, by the Imams, by the Prophet, by God, by your head, that I will never do it again. The proof that I will keep my word is that you will immediately ask my father to give me to you in marriage. I do not want any other master but you, and I will belong to you all the days of my life."

She embraced me more vigorously than before. I became most anxious and thoughtful. To be sure, I loved her dearly, but I had never told her I had money because I feared she might want it and get it away from me. If I asked my uncle for her, I would inevitably have to disclose the existence of my small treasure to my father and mother and all my relatives as well as to her. I was ruined, lost, murdered. On the other hand, I had a great longing to marry Leila, as this would fill me with the greatest joys to be imagined in this world or the next. Besides, I would no longer have to fear the attentions of Hasan, Kerim, Suleiman and Abdulla, which simply made me boil. Still, I was not ready to part with my money. I was in such a state of perplexity that my sobs redoubled, and in unutterable agony I tightened my arms around Leila.

## *The War of the Turkomans*

Thinking that she alone was the cause of these transports, she said, "My soul, why are you so troubled just when you have learned that you are to possess me?"

Her gentle voice touched me so deeply that I began to lose my head and answered: "It is because I am so poor that I am even in debt for the clothes I have on. I swear by your head that I cannot afford to pay for them, even if they are positively not worth five *sahabgrans*. How can I pay my uncle the dowry he will demand of me? If he would only be satisfied with a promise! Do you think that is impossible?"

"Oh, impossible, quite impossible," answered Leila, shaking her head. "How can you expect my father to surrender a girl as pretty as I am for nothing? You must be reasonable."

While speaking, she stared at the water, and with one hand she plucked some dainty flowers that were scattered in the grass along the river-bank; at the same time, she pouted so charmingly that I was beside myself. However, I wisely answered: "That is very unfortunate. Alas, I possess nothing in all the world."

"Is that true?" she said, throwing her arms around my neck and giving me a meaning look with her head to one side.

Without realizing it, and completely losing my

## *The War of the Turkomans*

senses, I murmured, "I have thirty gold *tomans* buried two steps from here."

I pointed to the trunk of the tree at the foot of which my treasure was buried. She laughed, and a cold sweat broke out on my forehead.

"You liar," she cried, kissing me on the eyes. "How little you love me! It is only by entreaties that I get the truth out of you. Now, go and find my father and ask him for me. You will promise him seven *tomans* and will give him five, swearing that you will bring the other two later on. He will never see them. As for me, I will know how to get two away from him to bring back to you, so I will have cost you only three *tomans*. Don't you see how much I love you?"

I was overjoyed at this and hurried away to find my uncle. After two days of arguments, mingled with many entreaties, speeches and tears from me, I finally won out and married my beloved Leila. She was so charming and so artful in getting her own way (later I learnt how she did it and whence this irresistible power came) that a few days after the wedding Leila persuaded me to settle at Zenjan, the capital of the province, with her. She induced her father to give her a superb donkey, and without his permission carried away a fine carpet. The truth is she is a jewel of a woman.

As Leila wanted to amuse herself and I was of the same mind, we began to lead a merry life, thanks to

## *The War of the Turkomans*

the twenty-five *tomans* that remained. We were hardly settled in our new home when Kerim, one of the cousins of whom I had been so jealous, arrived. At first I had a fancy to be jealous again, but my wife joked so much about it that I had to laugh myself, and, besides, Kerim was such a good fellow that I became extremely fond of him. To tell the truth, he deserved it, for I never saw a man laugh so constantly. He was always telling stories that made me split my sides. We spent most of our nights drinking *raki* together, and I finally persuaded him to live with us.

Things went on very well like this for three months. Then I grew ill-tempered. Certain matters displeased me. What, I could not say, but Leila wearied me, and I began to wonder why I had lost my head about her. One day, while mending the lining of my cap, which was ripped, I uncovered the cause. Here, to my astonishment, I found a small package of many-coloured silk, wool and cotton threads mingled with a lock of hair precisely the colour of my wife's. It was not difficult for me to recognize the talisman that had bewitched me. I hastened to remove the baneful objects, and, when I put my cap on my head, my thoughts had taken an entirely different channel. I cared no more for Leila than for any passer-by. I bitterly regretted the thirty *tomans* that were now almost all spent, and this made me thoughtful and morose. Leila noticed this. She tried blandishments without effect, as was

## *The War of the Turkomans*

natural since her spells no longer had power over me. Then she became angry and Kerim interfered. A dispute followed. I do not know what I said or what my cousin answered, but, drawing my *gama*, I was on the point of transfixing his body. He forestalled me with his own, which he had drawn, and gave me a gash in the head from which the blood began to flow copiously. At Leila's frightful screams, the neighbours ran in, and, with them, the police, and they had already taken hold of the unfortunate Kerim to lead him to prison when I cried out: "By God, in God's name, for God's sake, do not touch him! He is my cousin! He is the son of my aunt, he is my friend, the light of my eyes! He has a right to my blood!"

I loved Kerim very much, infinitely more than Leila, and I would have been disconsolate if he had suffered for a wretched quarrel which we were well able to settle ourselves. I was so eloquent that, although the blood streamed down my face, every one became calm and left us alone. Kerim and Leila bound up my wound, and we all three embraced one another, and I lay down and went to sleep.

The next day the *ketkhoda*, or magistrate of the district, sent for me and informed me that I had been drafted as a soldier. I might have expected something of the kind. No one knew me at Zenjan, where I was a stranger. I had no protector. Why should I not be the very first to fall into a hole like this where every

## *The War of the Turkomans*

one would naturally be eager to push me in order to exempt himself or his family? I wanted to cry out, to protest, but, without being in the least disturbed, the *ketkhoda* had me bound to the *felekeh*. I was thrown on my back. Two *ferrashes* held my feet in the air with the ends of their cudgels, and two executioners, with a ferocious mien, brandished the handles of switches and administered a shower of lashes on the stick to which I was fastened because, in falling, I had slipped into the palms of each of them a *sahabgran*.

This brought it home to me what I must expect henceforth if I continued to struggle against my lot. Besides, I reflected that I did not even possess a copper, or know which way to turn. Although it might be tiresome to turn to the right and left and perform those ridiculous drills that are forced upon the infantry, yet there might be some consolation and some windfalls in this calling that were as yet unknown to me. At last, since I could not escape my fate and it was my destiny to be a soldier, I thought it best to resign myself and make what I could of it.

When Leila heard what had happened to me, she screamed horribly and struck herself on her face and bosom with her fists and pulled out some hair from her head. I consoled her as well as I could, and Kerim exerted himself too. She was finally satisfied, and seeing her in a calmer mood I made her the following speech:



## *The War of the Turkomans*

"Light of my eyes, all the Prophets, the Imams, the Saints, the Angels and God himself are my witness that I can only live with you, and if I had not possessed you I swear on your head that I would be dead or even worse. In my sad predicament I have only thought of your happiness and of what will become of you now that I have to go away. The wisest course is for you to take back your freedom and find a more fortunate husband than I am."

"Dear Aga," she replied, embracing me, "you feel infinite love for me and I have the same in my heart for you, my dear and adored husband. As it is woman's nature to be more devoted to her loved ones than man is, I am more inclined to sacrifice myself than you are. So I think that, much as it will cost me, it is wisest for me to give you your freedom. As for me, my destiny is fixed. I will remain here to weep until there is not another tear in my poor body, and then I will expire."

At these sad words, Leila, Kerim and I began to sigh together. All three of us might have been seen seated on the rug facing each other with a *baggali* of *raki* in a blue glass between us and our three cups, rocking back and forth and uttering woeful cries broken by such exclamations as:

"Ya Ali! Ya Hasan! Ya Hosain! Oh, my eyes! Oh, my life! I am dead!"

Then we would embrace each other and sob more than ever. The truth is that Leila and I adored each

## *The War of the Turkomans*

other, and the all-powerful God has never created, and never will create, a more devoted and faithful woman. Yes! Yes! It is too true, and I cannot help crying even now when I think of it.

The next morning, early, my dear wife and I went to the Molla to ask for the divorce. Then she returned home, after bidding me a most tender farewell. As for me, I went straight to the bazaar, to the shop of an Armenian vendor of *raki*, where I was sure to meet Kerim. For the last three days, in the midst of my troubles, I had been engrossed with an idea.

"Kerim," I said, "I intend to present myself to-day to my sultan, that is, my captain. I hear he is punctilious and that he prides himself on his nicety. If I make my salutation to him in the torn and spotted garment I am wearing, he will receive me badly, and this beginning might have an unfortunate influence on my military career. I beg of you to lend me your new *kulijah* for this important occasion."

"My poor Aga," answered Kerim, "I can not possibly grant your wish. There is an important event for me to-day. I am going to be married, and it is absolutely necessary for the sake of my friends that I should be dressed in new garments. Besides, I like the *kulijah* very much; it is of yellow cloth milled at Hamadan, bordered with a pretty galoon of silk from Kandahar; it was made by Baba-Taher, the tailor who works for the greatest lords of the province. He him-

## *The War of the Turkomans*

self assured me he had never made anything so perfect. I have decided to pawn my *kulijah* when the wedding ceremony is over because, as I have no money to-day, I will have many debts to-morrow, so you understand that even to please you I cannot deprive myself of my only wealth."

I gave myself up to the deepest despair (for truly I was enraptured with this *kulijah*) and answered, "I am lost, ruined, abandoned by all, with no one to care in the least about my troubles."

These sad words touched my friend. He began to reason with me. He said all he could to console me and went on to excuse himself on account of his marriage, his well-known poverty and a thousand other things, and finally, seeing me so disconsolate, he relented and spoke these heartening words:

"If I were certain that you would return my *kulijah* in an hour!"

"By what do you want me to swear it?" I answered with spirit.

"You will return it to me?"

"At once, in less than an hour—just the time to show myself and come back. By your head, by my eyes, by the life of Leila, by my own welfare, may I burn like a damned cur if you do not have your coat back even before you want it."

"Then come."

He led me into his room and I saw the magnificent

## *The War of the Turkomans*

garment. It was yellow! It was superb! I was enraptured; I quickly tried it on. Kerim exclaimed that it was a most unusual coat. The tailor was an admirable man and in appreciation he would surely pay him some day.

"But," he said, "it is not possible to wear such a coat with torn, blue cloth trousers. Look! Here are my new red silk *shalwars*."

I quickly slipped them on. I looked like a prince and dashed out of the house. I promenaded in the bazaars for two hours. Women stared at me and I was at the acme of joy. I met two young fellows who had also enlisted in the regiment. We went to a Jew's together to drink. They were to leave that night for Teheran to join their unit. I decided to go with them, and, having borrowed some garments from one of them and the rest from the other, I carefully folded up my magnificent costume. While the Jew had his back turned, we reached the door, then the street, and finally the limits of the city. Roaring with laughter at the foolish things we said, we entered the desert and marched half the night.

Our journey was very gay and happy and I began to think that a soldier's life suited me perfectly. One of my two companions, Rustem-Beg, was a *vekil*, a sergeant of a company. He proposed that I should enter under his orders, and I accepted eagerly.

"You see, brother," he said to me, "some fools think

## *The War of the Turkomans*

it is most unfortunate to be a soldier. Do not make that mistake. Only boobies are unfortunate in this world. You're not one, nor am I, nor is our Kourshid here. Have you a trade?"

"I am a hunter."

"That does not pay at Teheran. Become a mason. Our friend Kourshid is a blacksmith, while I am a wool-comber. You will give me a quarter of your pay, and the sultan will get half because he is your captain. From time to time you will give a small present to the *naib*, or lieutenant, who is not very clever but not a bad fellow; the colonel naturally takes the rest, and you live like a king on what you earn."

"Do masons earn much at Teheran?"

"They earn something. But there are many other sources of income to make life pleasant and I will teach them to you."

He taught me one on the way and it was very amusing. As he wore his commission of *vekil*, we presented ourselves as tax-collectors in a village. The peasants were completely duped, and, after much discussion, gave us a little present so that we would not levy the poll-taxes and give them a delay of fifteen days. This we gladly accorded and left, covered with their blessings. After several similar pleasantries, all to our profit, amusement and glory, we finally entered the capital by the Shimiran Gate, and on a fine morning presented ourselves to our *serheng*, Colonel Mehdi-Khan.

## *The War of the Turkomans*

We saluted this great personage as he was crossing the court of his house. The *vekil*, who knew him, presented us, Kourshid and me, and in fine words eulogized our courage, obedience and devotion to our chief. The colonel appeared to be delighted with us and sent us to the barracks with some kind words. From that time on I was a member of the second regiment of Kamsch.

I have to admit that certain sides of military life are not at all gay. It is nothing to forfeit one's pay. Since the viziers eat up the generals, I admit it seemed natural that these should live off the colonels. The latter, in turn, consume the majors, and these the captains and the captains their lieutenants and soldiers. These last are obliged to discover some other means of livelihood, and, thanks to the Lord, no one hinders them. But the trouble is the European instructors, and all the world knows that there is nothing as brutal and absurd as some of these Firenks. They always have a mouthful of honest, upright words and maintain that the soldiers should be regularly paid. That in itself would not be bad, but on the other hand they want to make beasts of burden of us, and this would be hateful. Frankly, if they were to succeed with their schemes, we would be so pitiable that life would no longer be worth living. For example, they wanted actually to force us to live in the barracks and sleep there each night; to come in and go out at definite hours accord-



## *The War of the Turkomans*

ing to their watches, so that we would become absolutely like machines and could no longer breathe except by rule. God did not ordain it so. Then they would have all of us without exception come out on the parade-ground, in the summer sun or winter rain—for what? To lift and lower our legs, move our arms, turn our heads to right and left. Villah! Billah! Tal-lah! There was not one of them capable of explaining the purpose of these absurdities. I admit that when I see one of these people pass by I keep out of the way, for one never knows what madness will seize them. Fortunately, the heavens created them as stupid as they are brutal, so that one can usually make them believe anything. Glory to God, who has given this means of defence to the Muslims!

As for me, I saw at once what these European instructors were, and I kept myself as far away as possible. As my friend the *vekil* had recommended me to the sultan, I never went to what is called drill, and my life was quite bearable. Ours replaced the Suleiman Regiment which had been sent to Shiraz, so I belonged to a detachment occupying a guard-house in the bazaar. Those European dogs, curse them, maintained that the guard should be relieved every day and the men sent back to the barracks. All they knew was how to devise torments for the poor soldier. Fortunately, the colonel was not anxious to be constantly annoyed and disturbed, so that, once in a bodyguard,

## *The War of the Turkomans*

one settled down, took it easy and lived there not for twenty-four hours, but for two or three years, or sometimes for as long as the regiment was garrisoned in the city.

Our guard-house was quite pleasant. It was at the crossing of two avenues of the bazaar. It was a building with one room for the *naib* and a vast hall for the soldiers. There were no windows, but a door opened on a wooden gallery raised three feet above the ground and facing the street. There were many alluring shops near our building. To begin with, there was the fruit-merchant who displayed his grapes, melons and water-melons in pyramids and festoons above the head of the purchaser. In a corner of the counter a case of figs sat in state from which the worthy merchant always allowed us to help ourselves when we came to chat with him in the evening about all kinds of interesting topics. A little farther on was a butcher who sold us excellent mutton, but for each piece that he was paid for there were four whose disappearance was an insoluble mystery to him. In despair he told us of the pilfering of which he was the victim. As we occasionally brought him a culprit who admitted the theft, restored the stolen object and was pardoned, he was never unjust enough to suspect us.

My emotions are still stirred when I think of the keeper of a cook-shop whose ovens exhaled a fragrance worthy of paradise. He had an absolutely inimitable

## *The War of the Turkomans*

way of preparing *kebabs*. Each piece of meat was broiled to a turn and saturated just enough with juices of laurel and thyme-leaves so that one seemed to have a heavenly morsel in one's mouth.

The supreme attraction of our neighbourhood was the story-teller who held forth in the court of a ruined house. Every day, to an audience full of admiration and breathless with curiosity, he told stories of fairies, genii, princes, princesses and terrible heroes, all intermingled with such sweet verses that one became half crazed. The hours I spent there were delightful beyond my powers of description.

In short, it is quite true that life in a guard regiment is charming. Our *naib*, a handsome fellow, never put in an appearance. He gave his entire pay and nice presents besides to his superiors, so that he was permitted to act as *pishkedmet*, or footman, in an important house. This yielded him more than his lieutenancy. My friend, the *vekil*, went off every morning, and I still see him with his big stick, his wide trousers which had once been white, his red cloth jacket, torn at the elbows, his girdle of uncertain colour and his battered cap. He went to work as a wool-comber and often stayed away eight days. The rest of us, who did not know where else to sleep, usually returned to the guard-house between midnight and two o'clock in the morning. Usually, by eight or nine o'clock, we had all left, except one or two who, for some reason or other,

## *The War of the Turkomans*

consented to guard the house. It is well known that soldiers are only on duty in a guard-house to present arms to the notables who pass by. We did this constantly. When a lord on horseback, surrounded by his servants, appeared in one of the avenues leading to our guard-house, all the shopkeepers shouted warnings to us. Our detachment consisted of about twenty men, but there were never more than four or five representatives, who were naturally busy talking or sleeping, and often there was no one there at all. At such times, assistants dashed out from all the shops, and, taking our guns from the corners where we had thrown them, they lined up in superb order, one of them impersonating the *vekil*, another the *naib*, and all presented arms with the martial gravity of the fiercest Europeans. The great personage graciously bowed his head and everything was correct. It is with pleasure that I recall this excellent guard-house, those kind neighbours, the delightful life I led, and I earnestly hope to find as good a situation for my old age. Inshallah! Inshallah!

I did not spend any more time in the barracks than my comrades. Following the advice of the *vekil*, I had become a mason and earned some money, but I earned more by lending it. I had speedily sold Kerim's magnificent costume to an old-clothes dealer, and this put me in funds. I began to lend money to my friends and acquaintances who soon swarmed about me. I only

## *The War of the Turkomans*

gave very small loans and exacted most prompt repayments. This prudence was imperative and it paid. However, I sometimes had dealings with debtors from whom I could collect nothing. To counterbalance these defections, I borrowed myself and did not always pay back. So I estimate that I never had big losses. Between times I took pains to be agreeable to my superiors. I sometimes presented myself to the colonel; I was attentive to the major; I was, I make bold to say, the sultan's friend; the *naib* confided in me; I steadily cultivated the goodwill of the *vekil*, to whom I often gave small gifts. As a consequence, I never had to put my foot in the barracks. They did not see any more of me at the drill. I passed the rest of my time either at business or in pleasures, and no one found fault with me. I admit I liked to frequent the Armenian and Jewish cabarets. But, one day, as I was passing the King's College, I felt like entering, and I attended a lesson which the learned Molla-Aga-Teherani was giving in the garden. I was charmed with it. From that day forward I had a fondness for metaphysics and was often seen amongst the listeners of the sublime professor. There was a good and numerous company there; students, soldiers like myself, nomad horsemen, noblemen and plain folk. We discussed the nature of the soul and the relation of God to man. It was most enchanting. I went with learned and virtuous people. I became acquainted with some quiet persons of note

## *The War of the Turkomans*

who taught me far-reaching doctrines, and I began to understand, for the first time, that everything is awry in the world. It is indisputable that empires are governed by horrible rascals. To shoot them all would only administer justice to them, but to what purpose? Their successors would be worse. Glory to God, who, for reasons we know not of, ordained that wickedness and stupidity should govern the world.

I often thought of my dear Leila and my beloved Kerim. Then there were tears in my eyes, but not for long. I returned to my debtors, my creditors, my mason's work, my cabarets, my companions in carousals and to the philosophy of Molla-Aga-Teherani, and I gave myself up absolutely to the Supreme Will who arranges all according to his views.

In this pleasant fashion a year passed, and as an old soldier I can say I never saw anything managed better. One evening, after an absence of three days, I entered the guard-house at about ten o'clock and was extremely surprised to find all my comrades, as well as the *naib*, there. They were seated on the ground in a circle, around a blue lamp which gave a faint light, and all were dissolved in tears. The one who wept the most was the *naib*.

"A greeting to you, Excellency," I said. "What's the matter?"

"Misfortune has fallen upon the regiment," the officer answered with a sob. "The august government has



## *The War of the Turkomans*

resolved to exterminate the Turkoman nation and we have orders to leave for Meshed to-morrow.”

At this heart-rending news I did as the others—I sat down and wept.

Every one knows that the Turkomans are terrible people. They are always making raids which they call *tjapao* along their frontiers, into the provinces of Iran, the well-protected, and carry off hundreds of poor peasants. They sell them to the Ouzbeks of Khiva and Bokhara. I thought it quite natural for the august government to determine to destroy these pillagers to the last man, but it was most perverse to send our regiment. We passed part of the night grieving. However, since this despair did not help us in any way, we ended by laughing and were in very good humor when the men from the Damghan Regiment came to replace us at dawn. We took our guns, spent an hour saying good-bye to our friends of the quarter, left the city and joined the rest of the regiment, who were drawn up in battle-array, in front of the Doolet Gate. I learnt that the King himself was to review us. Four regiments were there—each presumably composed of 1000 men, but actually there were only three or four hundred. There was our own, the second of Khamseh, a regiment from Isfahan, another from Goum and the first from Ardebyl; then two batteries of artillery and about 1000 cavalrymen, the Slysoupours, the Kakevends and the Alavends. The sight was magnificent.

## *The War of the Turkomans*

Our red and white uniforms alongside the white and blue of the other corps were strikingly beautiful. Our officers had narrow trousers with gold stripes and *kulijahs* of orange, sky-blue or rose colour. Then in succession came the *myrpendi*, general of the division, with his suite; the *Emir* Touman who commands twice as many people, with a large troop of cavalry; the *Sipeh-Salar*, surrounded by even more people and finally the King himself, the ministers and all the pillars of the Empire, and lastly a retinue of servants. It was magnificent. The drums rolled with a deafening noise; European music beat the time, while the men furnished with their extraordinary instruments swayed to the rhythm to keep in time. The flutes and the tambourines of the camel-artillery whistled and snorted; the crowd of men and women surrounding us were wild with joy and we proudly participated in the general satisfaction.

All of a sudden, the King, who had mounted an eminence with the great lords, gave the order for the officers of the "tamasha" to run from one end of the field to the other. It is strange that the Europeans, whose languages are as ridiculous as their minds, have the advantage of lending us the very word that perfectly expresses this. Only in their inability to pronounce this properly, these fools say *État-Major*, the staff. Tamasha makes a fine show and is the only useful thing I ever noticed in European tactics. One must

## *The War of the Turkomans*

admit it is charming. Very handsome young men, dressed in their best, mounted on fine horses, run at full speed from all sides; they advance, retreat and turn; it is delightful to watch; they are not allowed to walk their horses, as this would spoil the fun. It is a very pretty contrivance. God be praised for it!

When the King had enjoyed watching the tamasha for some time, they wanted to show him how the Turkomans were to be dealt with. For this they had prepared a mine which they exploded, only they did not wait long enough after having warned the near-by soldiers for them to withdraw, so that three or four were killed. Except for this accident, all went off very well and every one had a good time. Later three balloons were sent off amid great applause, and finally the infantry, cavalry, and artillery marched past the King. That night we received orders to start off at once, which we did two days later.

The first week of our journey the regiment advanced in a northeasterly direction along the foot of the mountains. After marching two months, we were to join our general, our colonel, the major and most of the captains at Meshed or elsewhere. We were merely soldiers with three or four sultans, the *naibs* and our *vekils*. We marched in good spirits. We started off every day at about two o'clock in the morning and arrived towards noon at some place where there was water and encamped there. The column advanced in

## *The War of the Turkomans*

small-groups, each one joining his friends according to his convenience. If any one was tired he stopped on the way and had his fill of sleep and then joined the others. We had with us, as is customary in all regiments, a long file of donkeys carrying our baggage, the provisions of those who had any, our guns and our cartridge-boxes, as you can understand that no one was so foolish as to encumber himself with his weapons during the march. What for? Some officers had ten or twelve donkeys each for himself, but two soldiers of our company had twenty which they had purchased at Teheran at the moment of departure, and I shared with them because that was a good idea of theirs.

These twenty donkeys were laden with rice and butter. When we arrived at the *menzil*, that is, the halt, we unpacked our rice, butter and even some *tombeki*, and sold it at quite a high price. In spite of this, we got rid of it, and our speculation was very successful. They had to have recourse to us or they would have been in great want from the very first days. Every one knows that in the wide valleys of Iran there are very few villages, especially in those crossed by the highways. The peasants are not so foolish as to settle on the soldier's line of march. They would have no truce or peace and would end by dying of hunger, in addition to all kinds of annoyances. Therefore, they settle away from the roads and in localities where it is difficult to

## *The War of the Turkomans*

reach them. But the soldiers are not fools either. Upon arriving at the *menzil*, those of us who were acquainted with the country would reconnoitre. The least tired from the march would go on a search. Sometimes, going and coming, we had to walk three or four additional leagues, but the hope of augmenting our provisions sustained us. We had to take the village by surprise. This was not always easy. Those peasants, the damned dogs are so tricky. If they saw us from afar, all of them, men, women and children, fled, carrying away every last atom of their possessions. Then we would find only the four walls of each house and nothing to take along, and we had to come back, without stopping, more tired than ever, to undergo the ill-natured jokes of our comrades. When we were luckier and could put our hands on the villagers, by God, the blows fell and we struck without mercy and returned with wheat, rice, sheep and chickens. But that did not happen often. Sometimes we met cruel and vicious people, more numerous than ourselves, who received us with musket-shots. Then we had to flee, happy to get away without further misadventure. At such times the man without a good pair of legs is a poor devil indeed.

It would be unfair not to say that the august government had announced that we would be very well nourished during the whole campaign. But no one had believed it. These are things that all august governments say, but cannot possibly carry out. The chief

## *The War of the Turkomans*

general would never take the trouble to spend money for soldiers' fare that he might keep in his pocket. And indeed, at the end of fifteen days, having no more rice to sell, my two friends and I closed up shop. There were not two loaves of bread to be found in the whole regiment and we began to eat the donkeys.

I never saw fiercer peasants than those of Khorasan. They live in fortified villages. When a poor soldier approaches, they close their gates and climb their walls, and if he does not hurry away as fast as possible he will receive a volley of shots that will not miss him. May the fathers and grandfathers of these horrible assassins burn eternally in the deepest hell without relief! Inshallah! Inshallah! Inshallah!

So we began to eat the donkeys. The miserable creatures! I forgot to tell you that only a few remained. As they had not been fed, they began to die, one after another, and their corpses marked our line of march. The few we kept alive with infinite care were poorly nourished. When we arrived at each halt we had the trouble of going to look for grass for them far away in the mountains. Besides, they were exhausted with fatigue. I know that we began to unload them quite early of our guns and accoutrements, which we threw away in the desert, but we held on as long as we could to our baggage. In short, we had to mount them ourselves, we being the most precious burden. There was no water and it was terrible. We had to spend more



## *The War of the Turkomans*

than half the day making holes in the ground to find a little. When we were lucky we succeeded in bringing to light a brackish mud which we purified as best we could by straining it through rags. We ended by having only grass to eat, and very little at that. Many of our comrades ended like the donkeys—they died. That did not stop us from singing: better not to live at all than to be in despair over the evils which are an inseparable part of life, and, besides, with patience, one can put up with anything. The proof is that the remnants of the regiment succeeded in reaching Meshed.

In truth, we made no fine appearance as we approached the holy city. The major and some captains came to meet us, together with vendors of all kinds of provisions. We had to pay dearly for what they gave us. We were so hungry that we did not take the trouble to bargain. Unless one has experienced similar misfortunes, one does not know what it is, suddenly, actually, to see a boiled head of mutton offered to one. The good meal we had there heartened us.

The major called us sons of dogs because we had lost our guns, but he had some others distributed which had been borrowed from the Khosrova regiment for this purpose, and we assessed ourselves to make him a small present and good accord was re-established between us. It was agreed that he would make a favourable report of our conduct to the colonel for whom we prepared another present of almost ten *tomans*.

## *The War of the Turkomans*

After these arrangements, our entry into Meshed was fixed for the next day.

At the appointed time, the drums of the other regiments, which had already arrived, led the way. They were necessary, as we had thrown ours away with our guns. A big troop of officers, mounted on horses which they had managed to find, were behind the guns, and then we advanced in as good order as possible. We numbered about two or three hundred. The townspeople received us with unconcern, since they had been frequently regaled during the last month with similar entries which were not attractive to them. We were assigned a piece of ground for our encampment, but as the ground was swampy all the men dispersed, hoping to find shelter and board in the town.

As for myself I directed my steps towards the mosque of the holy Imams. My piety led me there, and also the hope that I might receive some of the soup that is regularly distributed to unfortunates, for unfortunate I surely was. In the whole universe there is nothing more beautiful than the venerable mosque of Meshed. Its great dome, its sumptuous and magnificent door, flanked by elegant turrets, the whole covered from top to bottom with tiles enamelled in blue, yellow, and black; its superb courtyard with a vast pool for ablutions—the whole transports one with admiration. From morning till night multitudes of pilgrims, coming from Iran, Turkestan, from the heart of India and far-away

## *The War of the Turkomans*

lands of Roum (Constantinople), bring a constant tribute of genuflections, prayers, gifts and alms to the Imam Riza (may his name be praised!). The sacred place is always filled with a noisy crowd. Groups of poor people come to receive the nourishment the Mol-las prepare for them every day. These would joyfully let themselves be killed to preserve the traditions of the mosque. Respectfully, and much moved, I made my way through the groups, and as I discreetly asked one of the doorkeepers, whose head was covered by a vast and elaborate white turban, where I should go to obtain my share of the distribution, this dignified and respectable turban, or rather head supporting it, showed me a surprised and then a joyous countenance, and while the jetlike eyes lighted up with joy a wide mouth opened in the midst of a huge black beard and shouted with pleasure:

"May the holy Imams be blessed! It is you! You, yourself, Baba-Aga!"

"Myself," I answered, looking fixedly at the speaker and after a moment's hesitation recognizing him perfectly.

"Vallah! Billah! Tallah!" I cried. "Is it you, Cousin Suleiman?"

"It is I, my friend, my relative, light of my eyes! What have you done with our Leila?"

"Alas," I said, "she is dead!"

"Oh, my God, what a misfortune!"

## *The War of the Turkomans*

"She is dead," I continued sadly. "If that had not happened would I be here? I am a captain in the second regiment of Kamseh and very happy to see you again!"

It occurred to me to tell Suleiman that Leila was dead because I did not like to speak of her to him. I wanted to pass on as quickly as possible to another subject of conversation, but he did not lend himself to this.

"God!" he cried. "Dead! Leila dead! And you let her die, miserable creature that you are! Didn't you know that I loved her only in this world and that she never loved any one but me?"

"Oh, only you!" I answered in fury. "Only you! What you are saying is a bit strong! In that case, why didn't you marry her?"

"Because I possessed absolutely nothing! But on the very day of your marriage, she swore to me that she would divorce you and come and find me as soon as I could give her a suitable home. That is why I left. I came here. I became one of the porters of the mosque and I was going to let her know of my present success, and you overwhelm me with this unexpected blow!"

At this he began to cry out and weep, swaying forth and back. I had a good mind to punch his face, as I was angry at what he had just told me. Happily, I suddenly remembered that from now on it was much

## *The War of the Turkomans*

more Kerim's affair than mine, and I restrained myself and said:

"Poor Leila! She surely loved us both! What a misfortune that she is dead!"

At this, Suleiman fell upon my neck and said:

"My friend, my cousin, we shall neither of us ever be able to console ourselves! Come to my house. I want you to be my guest the whole time you are in Meshed. May all I have be yours!"

I was profoundly touched by this mark of Suleiman's kindness. I had always cherished him from the bottom of my heart, and seeing him so afflicted I shared his grief sincerely and mingled my tears with his. While we were crossing the courtyard, he presented me to the Mollas whom we passed. He said to them:

"Here is my cousin, Aga-Khan, major in the Khamseh regiment—a hero of olden days. Neither Rustem nor Afrasyab equalled his valour! If you will come and take a cup of tea with us, you will greatly honour my humble house."

I spent fifteen days with Molla Suleiman. It was a moment, a very fleeting moment, of delight. During this time they were gathering the scattered regiments, most of them in no better condition than ours, which is easily understood, after a long journey. To some of them shoes at least were supplied. We were given

## *The War of the Turkomans*

guns again, or at least implements resembling guns. More of this later. When we were almost equipped, one fine morning, we were told that the order for the departure had been given and that the regiment was to set out for Merv. I was not over-pleased. This time it meant going amidst a herd of Turkomans, and God only knew what might happen! I spent a very sad evening with Suleiman. He tried his best to console me, poor man, and gave me a great deal of well-sweetened tea to drink. We also drank a little *raki*. He spoke of Leila again and made me tell the circumstances of the death of the poor child for about the tenth time. I thought of undeceiving him, but as I had tried so hard to present the story in a certain way it seemed better to continue it and not to cast him into new perplexities. My poor friend! He had been so good to me that I took a melancholy pleasure in harmony with my mood in remembering many details this time which I had forgotten before. I told him that before expiring the poor child, whom we both mourned, had thought of him very lovingly. I cannot maintain that all my stories were altogether false, for I was so sorry for myself and for the others that it was quite natural to speak of sad and touching matters, and really, I must say, I did it with my whole heart. Suleiman and I again mingled our tears, and when I left him, towards morning, I swore to him, from the depths of my being, never to forget him. You will see that I kept my



## *The War of the Turkomans*

word. As for him, he embraced me with real affection. I joined my comrades, and the regiment marched off with me in the ranks alongside of my *vekil*.

We were very numerous. I saw the cavalry pass—they were men of the southern and western tribes. They looked well, better than ourselves, but their poorly nourished horses were not worth much. The general remained at Meshed. It seems that this is absolutely necessary, for one can direct better from afar than from near. The colonels had imitated the generals presumably for the same reason. In short, we had very few officers above the grade of captain, and this is proper, for the officers are not made to fight but to take the soldier's pay. Almost all the officers who had come with us were nomad horsemen, but it is known that this type of man is very uneducated and coarse and thinks only of fighting. The artillery had been sent on ahead.

We had been marching three days. It poured and was very cold. The ground was muddy and we walked with difficulty. We slipped and sometimes sank in up to our knees. We constantly had to cross wide ditches filled with muddy water, which was no easy matter. I had already lost my shoes, and, like my companions, from having repeatedly fallen in the mud and been in the water to the waist, and from having climbed the steep river-banks on all fours, I was covered with mud and so wet that I was shivering. Since the night before

## *The War of the Turkomans*

I had eaten nothing. All at once we heard the cannon. Our companies halted suddenly.

We heard the cannon. There were several discharges. Then, all at once, we heard no more. There was a moment of silence; then we saw the gunners' carriages in our midst; the gunners beating the horses unmercifully and throwing themselves upon us. Some of the men were crushed. Those who could got out of the way. The cannon jolted, jumped, stopped and some fell in the mud, others in the water. The gunners cut the traces of the harness and fled as quick as the wind. There was an uproar, a whirlwind, a scramble, a flash of lightning! We hardly had time to understand, and almost immediately those who were in the front line saw a cloud of cavalry coming rapidly towards us. A shout rose on all sides.

"The Turkomans! The Turkomans! Fire!"

I could not distinguish anything. I saw some men who, instead of dropping their arms, threw themselves after the gunners. I was going to do the same, when the *vekil* held me back and cried into my ear, in the midst of the din:

"Hold, Aga-Beg! Those who flee to-day are lost!"

He was right, entirely right, the good *vekil*, and my eyes gave me the proof. I saw, as I see you, this horde of cavalry of which I have just spoken divide as if by magic into myriads of companies running across the plain, skilfully avoiding the obstacles, like men ac-

## *The War of the Turkomans*

customed to the country. They turned, surrounded and seized the fugitives, overwhelmed them with beatings, took their weapons and made hundreds of prisoners.

"You see! You see, my children!" cried the *vekil* again. "See the fate that awaits you and awaits us all if we do not stay together! Come! Courage! Stand! Fire!"

There were about fifty of us. The frightful scenes before us gave such force to the sergeant's exhortations that, when one of those cursed plunderers came towards us, our company rapidly massed together, fired, recharged and fired a second, a third and a fourth time. By the holy Imams, we saw some of those heretics fall, those cursed dogs, followers of Abubekr, Omar and Osman; may those monsters burn eternally in hell! I tell you we saw them fall, and that gave us such spirit that, at the *vekil's* order, we advanced altogether, in pursuit of the enemy, who had halted and did not approach us. After a moment's hesitation, they fell back and fled. All this time, other bands of Turkomans were chasing the fugitives, picking them up, killing some and beating others and carrying off those who could walk. We yelled with triumph: "Allah! Ya Ali! Ya Hasan! Ya Hosain!" We were at the acme of joy; we were saved and afraid of nothing.

In the main, we were perfectly happy. Amongst the fifty of us, we had proved that thirty of our guns were serviceable. I will not say that mine was; to begin

## *The War of the Turkomans*

with, it had no cock and then the barrel was split, but it was a good weapon just the same, as I will prove by what follows. I had attached my bayonet, which had no socket, with a stout cord; it held wonderfully, and I only waited for a chance to use it.

I want to tell you that our example had been followed. A short distance away we saw soldiers firing and the Turkomans not daring to approach. Besides, a troop of about three or four hundred cavalymen had briskly charged the enemy and retaken some prisoners and a cannon. Unfortunately, the whereabouts of the gunners and their ammunition was not known. We threw the thing into a ditch. For an hour we saw the Turkomans. From afar they were still taking prisoners. Then they disappeared with their captives over the horizon. After that, our various groups came together and we saw that altogether there were only seven or eight hundred of us. This was not many out of the six or seven thousand who had left Meshed. But at least it was something, and when we found one another and considered what terrible lions we were, we did not doubt for an instant our ability to recover the lost ground and prevent the Turkomans from winning it back again. We were so pleased that nothing seemed difficult.

Our chief turned out to be the *Yuz-Bashi* of the cavalry. He was a Kurd called Rezi-Khan, a big, handsome man, with a short beard, fiery eyes and mag-

## *The War of the Turkomans*

nificent trappings. He was so happy that his joy seemed to elate his horse. Sparks emanated from both man and beast as they moved. There was also Abdul Rahim of the Bakhtiariis, a big, jolly fellow with enormous shoulders. He called to us:

“My children! My children! You are true Rustems and Iskenders! We will exterminate this Turkoman rabble to the last man!”

We were delighted. We began to sing. The infantry had two officers, a lieutenant whom I did not know and our *vekil*. The brave man cried out:

“Now for provisions and powder!”

We realized that we were dying of hunger. There was a remedy, however. We began to tear up the grass in the field. Part was kept for the horses. We decided to make a soup of the rest, but the rain continued in torrents. There was an additional difficulty in lighting a fire, for there was no wood. We could have made one with dry grass—we had plenty of dried grass—only it was swollen with water. We made the best of it and ate the grass as it was. This was not good, but it filled and satisfied the stomach. As for the powder, the problem was unsolved. When we left Meshed they had not given us very much. The generals had sold it. This time it was very hard to get any. We picked up some cartridges from the dead. We had about three hundred guns in condition to go off, and for each gun there were three charges all told. Rezi-Khan impressed upon

## *The War of the Turkomans*

each one not to shoot before he gave the order, but we were so happy that some of us shot off our guns that very evening to celebrate the victory. Besides, it did not matter, we had good bayonets.

By good luck we found a sort of entrenched camp built by the ancient pagans, with four stone ramparts and a pond in the centre of it. We all went into this place to pass the night, and we did wisely, for at dawn the Turkomans came back, and as they outnumbered us, if they had attacked us in the open plain, we might have been in difficulties.

We fired on the enemy behind our walls and killed a few. Enraged, they dismounted and began to climb like ants up our piles of stones. Then we went for them with our bayonets with Rezi-Khan at our head. We used them so ill that after ten minutes' struggle they turned tail and fled. Unfortunately, Rezi-Khan and the big Bakhtiari, who fought like tigers, were both killed. I was cut in the arm, but God is great! It was only a scratch.

See what rascals those Turkomans are! They fled, but not far. They returned almost at once and began to ride around our walls. They could easily see that we were not firing at all. There was a good reason for this: we had no more powder, not a grain, not an atom! God knows perfectly what he does!

Our enemies wanted to try a new assault, and some of them dismounted again. See them climbing the slope



## *The War of the Turkomans*

of the fort like ants! With the *vekil* leading us we go out, we fight them again and kill a dozen; they flee, the cavalry charges us, we just have time to get back into our hole; and from afar we see the head of the *vekil* stuck on the end of a lance running in the midst of the Turkomans.

Ah! I almost forgot to tell you how cold we were that night. Not a dry thread on our poor bodies. The rain kept falling. The bit of wet grass in our stomachs did not sustain us. As for me, I suffered intensely, and sixty of us died without our being able to explain how or why. The very high and merciful God had ordained it thus!

The night was very bad again; our only recourse was to lie close to one another and try to remember what warmth was. Towards morning the sky cleared. It was cold. We expected to be attacked. Our lieutenant was dead.

The Turkomans only appeared towards noon, but remained at a distance. At night they grew bolder and came within shooting distance around the entrenchment. Then they withdrew.

Night brought us more of our people. In all, we were more than four hundred, with no one to command, but we knew what to do, and if attacked we would have fallen on the infidels with our bayonets. However, we were all very weak.

The sun was sinking towards the horizon, and it

## *The War of the Turkomans*

was about the time for the evening prayer, when afar off we saw bands of Turkomans approaching in greater numbers than on the preceding days. Each one got up as best he could and took his gun, but, to our great surprise, this great multitude halted at a long distance from us and only four or five cavalymen left their comrades and came towards us, making signs of friendship and indicating that they wished to speak to us.

Some of our men were for dashing out and cutting off their heads, but what would have been the use? I said this, and so did some of the others, and after a short parley all were won over to my side. We went out to these sons of dogs and, having made many deep bows to them, brought them into the fort. We all sat down on the ground in a circle around the newcomers who were asked to sit on the horse-blankets.

Vallah! Billah! Tallah! There was a big difference between us! We looked like ghosts who had rolled in the mud and were dripping with misery; they wore good clothes with furs, shining weapons and splendid headgear. When they were seated, I, who had been chosen spokesman, said to the accursed ones:

“Greetings to you!”

“And our greetings to you!” they answered.

“We hope,” I continued, “that the health of Your Excellencies is good and may your desires be fulfilled in this world and the next.”

“The kindness of Your Excellencies is unbounded,”

## *The War of the Turkomans*

answered the eldest of the Turkomans. He was a tall old man, with a flat nose, a face as round as a water-melon; on his chin were a few scattered hairs, and his eyes were like crescent moons reversed.

"What commands do Your Excellencies wish to transmit to us?" I continued.

"It is we," said the old Turkoman, "who have come to present a request to you, Highnesses. You know we are miserable fathers of families, poor labourers, slaves of the King of Kings, and servants of Iran, the well-protected. For centuries we have striven by all the means in our power to prove our boundless affection to the august government. Unfortunately we are very poor; our women and children cry with hunger; the fields we cultivate do not yield enough to nourish them, and if we were not able to carry on a little harmless traffic in slaves we would all perish from want. Why persecute us?"

"All that Your Excellency has stated is the exact truth," I said. "As for us, we are very humble soldiers. If they sent us here, we do not know why, and now, overwhelmed by Your Excellencies, we beg you to permit us to return to the holy city of Meshed whence we came."

The Turkoman bowed most amiably and answered:

"Would to heaven it were possible! My companions and I are ready to offer you our horses and to pay you to accept a thousand tokens of our friendship, but

## *The War of the Turkomans*

judge of our sad position! The august government has attacked us without grounds. We were harming no one and, besides, our provisions are low. You have nothing to eat—we have barely eaten for a week. Come with us. You will be well treated. We will not sell you at Bokhara or Khiva. We will keep you with us, and if your friends want to buy you we will accept a moderate ransom. Is it not wiser to await your deliverance in our tents near a good fire than to risk dying of misery on the road?"

The old Turkoman looked like a good man. His companions talked about fresh bread, curdled milk and roast mutton. There was a great stir amongst us. Suddenly each one threw aside his gun. The ambassadors rose and we followed of our own free will.

When we reached the other horsemen, they greeted us properly and put us in the centre of the group, and, as we marched, we talked with our masters, who seemed to be good men. From time to time, one of us received a whip-lash because he did not walk fast enough. Otherwise, all went well, except that it was a hardship for people as tired as we were to have to make a journey of eight hours over rough ground before reaching the encampment towards which they were leading us.

The women and children came to meet us. This was the most difficult moment for us. It seems that, in the crowd, there were widows of a few days whose hus-

## *The War of the Turkomans*

bands we had killed and mothers who were angry because of what we had done to their sons. Women are bad the world over—these were atrocious. The least they wanted to do was to tear us with their nails, if they had been allowed to do so. The children would have treated us just as badly and received us with howls and a volley of stones. Fortunately, the men did not intend us to be destroyed, and, half scolding, half laughing, now and then hitting at these furies, they succeeded in getting us into the camp and placing our enemies and their small assistants, if not out of range of harmless insults, at least at a distance where they could not wound us. When we were all gathered at the assembly ground, we were counted and warned that those who tried to escape would be instantly killed. After this proclamation we were distributed amongst the cavaliers who had captured us and whose slaves we became. One got ten prisoners, another five and another two. I was given to quite a young boy who took me directly home with him.

As soon as I entered my master's tent, I saw that he was not poor. It was the kind of tent called *alatjik*; the partitions and walls were made of braided osier covered over with thick felt. On the wooden floor were rugs. There were three or four chests painted in many colours and a big bed with cushions, and in the middle of the tent a stove, giving off a pleasant warmth. In this charming house there was a young woman nurs-

## *The War of the Turkomans*

ing a child. I bowed to her respectfully, for she was surely my master's wife, but she did not even glance at me and barely looked at her husband. I will tell you presently more about the Turkoman women. Nothing very interesting.

They are homely enough to frighten the devil; witness the young lady of the tent to which I was led who, I learned later, was one of the beauties of the country. I would not have suspected it at first sight. She resembled a street porter of Tabriz. She had wide, flat shoulders, a large head, small eyes, prominent cheekbones, a mouth like a baker's oven, a flat forehead and two mountains on her chest. I have seen even worse ones. These women are stupid, bad and brutal, and know nothing but work, but they are forced to labour like mules, and that is right.

The master said to the lady:

"Put the child aside and serve me my supper."

The lady obeyed at once. She began to clatter the dishes and plates and made a sign for me to follow her out of the tent. I obeyed instantly, hoping to please her by my zeal. She conducted me to a sort of cabin, used for a kitchen, where something was boiling in a pot. She made a sign which I did not understand. Without explaining, she took a stick and beat me over the head.

Here, I said, is a kind of monster who will not make life easy for me.



## *The War of the Turkomans*

I was mistaken; she was a good woman. She beat me often, was very precise and wanted everything done in her way, but she fed me well, and when she was more accustomed to me she spoke more to me and I often cheated her without her knowing it. When she was in good humour, she would say, in a burst of laughter:

“Aren’t the people of Iran more stupid than our horses?”

“Yes, mistress,” I humbly replied, “that is very true. God ordained it so!”

“The Turkomans,” she continued, “pillage and rob you and even carry you off and sell you as much as they like, and you have not found a way to stop them.”

“That is true, mistress,” I answered again. “It is because the Turkomans are clever and we are donkeys.”

Then she shouted with laughter and never noticed that her milk and butter were diminishing to my profit. I have always noticed that the strongest people are the least intelligent. For example, look at the Europeans. They are so easily imposed upon, and wherever they go they imagine they are our superiors because they are our masters. They do not and never will learn the truth, that mind is far above matter. The Turkomans are exactly the same. They are brutes too.

My owners employed me in splitting wood, carrying water and leading the sheep to pasture. When I had

## *The War of the Turkomans*

no work to do I used to take walks in the country. I had made friends and would sing songs. I also made mouse-traps and taught a few of the women how to prepare Persian dishes which the men thought delicious. They rewarded me with buttered cookies and tea. Quite frequently there were marriages where I used to dance. This made the audience laugh a good deal, for they were in very good humour and one can easily see the reason. Our camp, the neighbouring camp, and the whole nation were elated because of their victory. They had a great many prisoners and expected to make a lot from them. After their burst of temper, the widows were delighted, as was natural, for a young Turkoman girl is not worth five gold *tomans*, and it requires special circumstances for one to be sought in marriage. On the other hand, a widow is valuable and is often prized very highly. This depends on the experience she has acquired in conducting her household, her reputation for economy, and how accustomed she is to managing everything about her. Besides, it is known whether she can bear children or not. As for love, you can well imagine that with the faces of these ladies there is no question of that. No one dreams of it or understands anything about it. Once I tried to tell my mistress about Medjnun's touching and beautiful passion for Leila, and this recalled Leila to me and cast me into the deepest grief. My mistress beat me unmercifully for

## *The War of the Turkomans*

having dared to bother her with such nonsense. She was very young, but had already had two husbands before the one she had for the time being, and she had three or four children over and above the bargain. She was greatly esteemed on this account, and I was aware that it was an honour for me to belong to such a lady.

I lived there quite peacefully for three months and was becoming accustomed to my lot. In truth, as I said, it was not very hard. Then one morning, while I was idly walking about the camp, two other Persian slaves of the Ghum regiment accosted me and said they had definitely heard and would swear to me on their heads that we were to be freed that day and sent back to Meshed.

This had been rumoured so often, and always falsely, that I laughed and told my comrades not to believe all they heard and to continue to be patient. However, in leaving them, I was troubled and agitated, as I always was upon hearing such news. I well know that ugly things happen in Iran and that there is much evil there; just the same, it is Iran, the best and holiest country in the world. Nowhere else is there so much pleasure and joy. He who has lived there wants to return, and when he is there he wants to die there. I did not believe what my comrades had told me, and yet my heart beat faster and I was so sad that instead of continuing my walk I returned to my master.

## *The War of the Turkomans*

He was just dismounting from his horse and talking to his wife. Seeing me, he called me.

"Aga," he said, "you are no longer my slave. They have ransomed you. You are my guest and you are to leave for Meshed."

I was so startled at these words that I thought I would choke, and the tent seemed to be turning around me.

"Is it true?" I cried.

"How stupid these Iranians are!" said the woman, laughing. "Why is that so extraordinary? Your government has ransomed the soldiers at ten *tomans* each. We might have sold them dearer, but that folly is past, and we have our money, so go back home and don't act like a fool."

I hardly heard what the creature was saying. I saw a vision before my eyes. I saw, yes, I saw the pretty valley of Khamseh where I was born. I distinctly saw the streams, the willows, the thick grass, the flowers, the trees at the foot of which I had buried my money, my beautiful adored Leila in my arms, my hunts, my gazelles and tigers, my dear Kerim, my excellent Suleiman, my good kind Abdullah, all my cousins, the baker at Teheran, the grocer's shop, the cook-shop, the faces of my friends; yes, yes, yes, my whole life appeared before me at that moment and a voice cried within me: You will live it again! I was drunk with happiness! I wanted to sing, dance, weep, and em-

## *The War of the Turkomans*

brace all those who appeared in my vision, and in this moment of supreme joy I uttered cries of anguish.

"Fool!" said the woman. "You drank *raki* last night and perhaps again this morning. If I ever get hold of you!"

Her husband laughed.

"You will never get hold of him, for he leaves this very day. From this moment, I repeat, you are free!"

I was free! I rushed from the tent and went towards the big space in the centre of the camp. My poor comrades, as elated as I was, came out from all the dwellings. We embraced one another and did not forget to thank God and the Imams. We cried out with all our hearts: Iran! Dear Iran! Light of my eyes! And then I gradually learned how we had suddenly left the shadows to enter such a beautiful light.

It seems that much had happened since the loss of our army and the beginning of our captivity. When the King of Kings heard what had occurred, he had been furious with the generals and accused them of having allowed the poor soldiers to fight the enemy alone without them. He had also accused them of selling the soldiers' provisions, powder, arms and clothes, and finally he had firmly declared his intention of having all the guilty ones beheaded.

Perhaps he would have done well to carry out this threat, but, after all, to what end? After these generals there would have been others exactly like them.

## *The War of the Turkomans*

It is the way of the world. It cannot be changed. So His Majesty acted more wisely in calming his fury. All that occurred was that the ministers and pillars of the Empire received many presents from the accused. Some were dismissed for several months. The King received magnificent presents, and it was decided that the officers should ransom all the soldiers captured by the Turkomans, at their expense, since they were the cause of the misfortune of these poor devils.

The point being settled, the generals had naturally taken the colonels and majors aside, who had acted exactly as they had. They threatened to bastinado them, to dismiss them and even to cut off their heads, and they did this so effectively that in the end they understood one another on that score. The colonels and majors gave presents to their superiors, and the latter were partially reimbursed for the expenses which the provision for their safety had prompted them to incur at Teheran.

Meanwhile, they had sent emissaries to the Turkoman tribes to negotiate for the ransom of the captives. It had been difficult to come to an understanding. However, they had reached an agreement, and that is how and why, after having lived through unbelievable agitations, we took leave of our former masters and former Turkoman friends and set out for Meshed in ecstatic happiness like birds in flight.



## *The War of the Turkomans*

It was wonderful weather. At night the stars shone like diamonds in the sky. During the day the sun covered sky and land with golden sparkles which streamed from her flaming circle. The whole universe smiled upon us, the most miserable, abandoned and maltreated of human beings, who had come out of extreme misfortune to fall back on hope at least, and we marched merrily and sang lustily until we were within two hours of Meshed. As we approached, we saw before us, clear against the blue sky, the cupolas, minarets and enamelled walls of the holy mosque and the many rows of houses of the city. As we were thinking of the good things there would be for us in the midst of this heavenly apparition, we were suddenly stopped by two regiments drawn up across the road, in the front of which was a troop of officers. We halted and made a deep reverence.

A molla approached us from the group of officers. When he was within speaking distance, he raised his hands and spoke as follows:

"My children! Glory to God, the Lord of the Universe, mighty and merciful, who rescued the prophet Jonas from the whale's belly and you from the hands of the fierce Turkomans!"

"Amen!" our whole troop cried.

"You must thank him by entering Meshed humbly, humbly, I tell you, as is fitting for miserable prisoners!"

## *The War of the Turkomans*

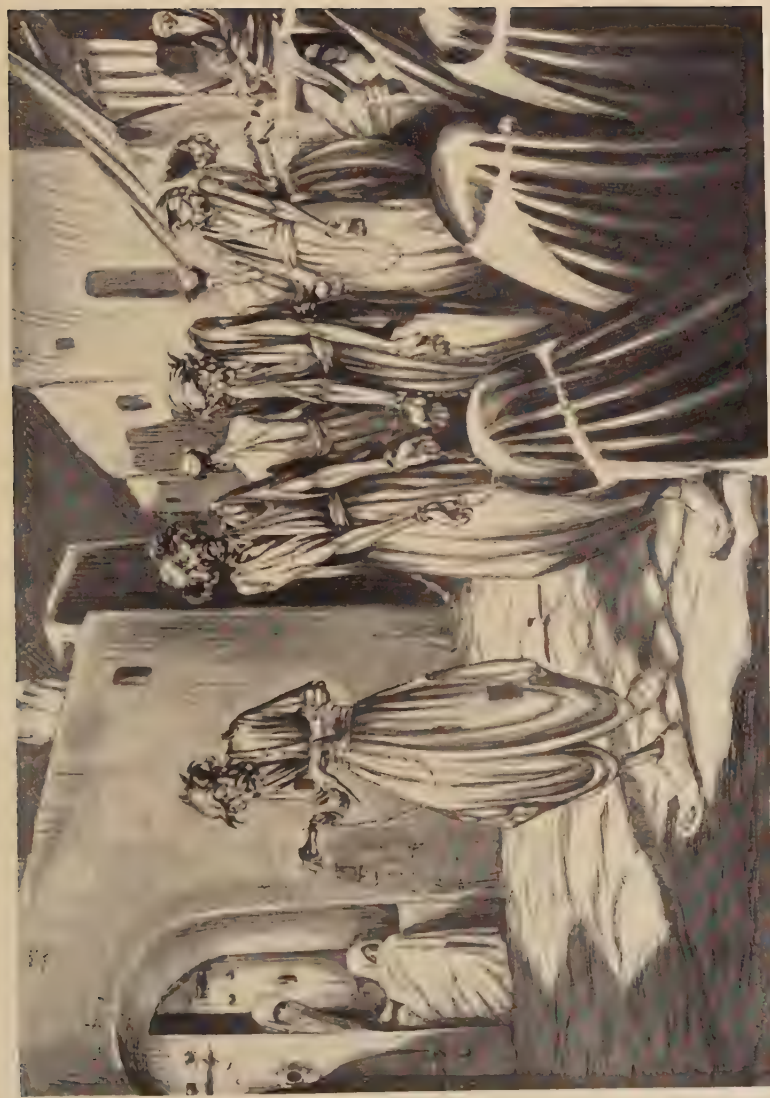
“We are ready! We are ready!”

“You will all, my children, as pious men and faithful Muslims, put chains on your hands, and the whole population, touched by this proof of your misfortunes, will overwhelm you with benedictions and alms.”

We thought this an excellent idea and were delighted with it. Then the soldiers from the two regiments broke ranks and came to us. They put iron collars on our necks and manacles on our hands and chained eight or ten of us together. We laughed a great deal at this, and thought it a good idea, although the weight of the metal was a little crushing. But, as it was only a question of wearing them for a few hours, this was a trifle.

When our toilet was completed, the drums, the music, the officers and one regiment led the way. Then, we moved forward, pitiable in our shackles but very happy, and at our heels the other regiment. We soon saw the crowd from Meshed coming to meet us. We greeted them and had the pleasure of hearing their blessings. Meanwhile, the drums beat, the music played and the cannon fired volleys in our honour.

When we reached the city, they separated us; some went down one street and others another, escorted by the soldiers. I, chained to seven comrades, with shackles on our arms and iron collars on our necks, was led to the guard-house and was allowed to sit on



### THE WAR OF THE TURKOMANS

I, chained to seven comrades, with shackles on our arms and iron collars on our necks . . .



## *The War of the Turkomans*

the platform. There, the sergeant who commanded our escort told us to solicit the passersby for alms. This was an excellent idea. We put it into practice at once with marvellous success. Men, women and children vied with one another in bringing us rice, meat and even dainties, and they gave us a little money. I think the good people who helped us did not have very much themselves.

In the evening, an officer arrived. We begged him to have our shackles removed, and let each one go about his own affairs. As for myself, I intended to pass a good night, which I sorely needed, with my friend and relative, Molla Suleiman. The officer said to us:

“My children, you must be reasonable. You fellows have been freed by the unequalled and superhuman generosity of my uncle, the general Ali-Khan. He gave ten *tomans* for each of you to your owners. Would it be just for him to lose such a big sum? You will agree that it would not be just. On the other hand, if he lets you go, although you are very honest and incapable of denying your debts, unfortunately you have no resources. Where would you poor soldiers find any money? Knowing this, my uncle, who is kindness itself, put you in the way of finding some. In leaving you chained until each of you collects fifteen *tomans* and faithfully hands them over to him, he gives you the means of touching the hearts

## *The War of the Turkomans*

of the Muslims and inducing them to give alms. Do not despair. Tell your troubles. Beg from all who come near you. Call to all of them, these good fellows who pass by; they will come. You see they feed you very well. Little by little they will pity you more and their purses will open. I am not deceiving you. In a few days, when there is no more hope of gathering in anything here, you will be sent away. You will go back to Teheran; from there you will go to Isfahan, Shiraz and all the cities of Iran, the well-protected, and in the end you will pay your debt."

The officer was silent, and we were furious. We were in despair and called him a son of a dog, and did not spare his uncle or the wives, mother or daughters of his uncle (perhaps he had none). At a signal from our tormentor, our guards fell upon us, beat us, threw us on the ground and trampled on us. I nearly had my side crushed in and my head was swollen with two huge bumps. After that we had to be sensible. Each of us submitted, and as for myself, after I had wept in a corner for half an hour, I resigned myself and once again, in a mournful voice, solicited alms from the passer-by.

There was no lack of charitable people, and all the world knows that, thanks to the all-powerful God, there is in Islam a great willingness to help the unfortunate. The women especially crowded around us and asked to hear our tale of woe. This was a long



## *The War of the Turkomans*

story, as we strung it out, adding that our wives and our five, six, seven or eight very young little children awaited us at home and were dying of hunger. We gathered in many small coins and sometimes silver pieces. Some of us were luckier than others.

Our regiments are recruited from the poor who, being without friends or protectors, cannot escape military life. When soldiers are needed, they pick up, in the streets, in the dance-halls of the cities, from the houses of the villages, those who have no influential friends. So there we were in our shackles, done for, children of fifteen and old men of seventy, because a man is a soldier for life unless he can find a way to exempt himself or flee.

Among us, those who received the most alms were the youngest. There was a handsome lad of sixteen, born at Zenjan. He was so showered with alms that he was freed in fifteen days. To be sure, he had the face of an angel. I succeeded in notifying Molla Suleiman of my plight. The good man rushed to me and threw himself around my neck and in dear Leila's name gave me a *toman*. This was a lot, and I heartily thanked him. I might have got more from him, but the next day they sent us away from Meshed and took us to Teheran.

My comrade and I composed a song about our misfortunes, and we regaled the peasants with it along the route. This always won us something. In addi-

## *The War of the Turkomans*

tion, the charitable Muslims always nourished the poor captives better than they had previously the poor soldiers of the King, and our guards benefited along with us. Each of us had to be very careful of his small receipts, as either we or our soldiers naturally tried to get possession of what did not belong to us. I tied up my money in a little blue rag. I showed it to no one and fastened it to a string under my clothes. When we reached the capital, I can admit that I possessed, counting the gold *toman* which my cousin had given me, several silver *sahabgrans* and a lot of copper *shahis*—about three and a half *tomans*. Some of my comrades I knew were richer than I, but others were poorer, for an old gunner, called Ibrahim, chained next to me, never got anything, he was so ugly.

At Teheran, they took us to my old guard-house and exhibited us on a platform. The people of the quarter recognized me and ran to me. I told the story of our troubles and they were going to give us a great deal when a miracle happened, God be praised! May the sainted Imams be praised and their holy names exalted! Amen! Amen! Glory to God, the Lord of the Worlds! Glory to God!

A miracle happened, and it was this. As always, a lot of women had gathered around us. They pushed against one another and came as near as they could to get a good look at us, so that I, who was telling

## *The War of the Turkomans*

our misfortunes to the public, was faced by a wall of blue and white veils. I was in the midst of this phrase, which I uttered with unction and despair.

"Oh, Muslims! Oh, Muslims! There is no more Islam! Religion is lost! I am from Khamseh! Alas! Alas! I come from near Zenjan! I have a poor blind mother, the two sisters of my father are cripples, my wife is a paralytic, and my eight children are dying of want! Alas! Muslims! If you do not hasten to free me with your charity, all of these will die of hunger and I shall die of despair!"

At that very moment I heard a piercing cry at my side, and a voice I instantly recognized struck my heart like a flash of lightning.

"Oh, God! By God! For God's sake! It is Aga!"

Instantly I cried out:

"Leila!"

Though she was covered with a thick veil, her face really shone as I looked at her. I was transported to the seventh heaven in my joy.

"Be quiet," she said; "you will be delivered this very day or to-morrow at the latest."

Thereupon she turned away and disappeared with the two other women who were with her. That evening, as I was dying of impatience, an officer came with a *vekil*. They severed my chain, and the officer said:

"Go where you wish, you are free!"

## *The War of the Turkomans*

As he spoke these words, I was embraced—by whom? By my cousin Abdulla!

God! How glad I was to see him!

“Oh, my friend! My brother! My beloved!” he said. “What a joy! What a meeting! When my cousin Kerim told me you had been taken by the militia, I was beside myself with grief!”

“That good Kerim,” I cried, “we always loved each other tenderly, he and I! Though I must say I sometimes preferred Suleiman to him, and, speaking of him, do you know . . .”

Then I told him what had become of our dignified cousin and how he was about to become a very learned Molla and a great personage at Meshed. The news delighted Abdulla.

“I regret,” he said, “that the position of our cousin Kerim is not so fine. It is his own fault. You know he had the unfortunate habit of being too fond of cold tea.”

This expression, “cold tea,” means, as all respectable people know, that vile liquor called *raki*.

“I know only too well that Kerim drank cold tea,” I said. “For a long time I exerted all my efforts to break him of this shameful habit. I never succeeded.”

“However,” Abdulla said, “his situation might be worse. I employ him as a muleteer and he drives my merchandise for me from Tebriz to Trebizond and earns a good living.”

## *The War of the Turkomans*

"Do I hear," I cried, "that you have become a merchant?"

"Yes, my brother," Abdulla answered modestly. "I have acquired a little property and this made it possible for me to help you to-day when my wife told me of your unfortunate condition."

"Your wife!" I was indeed surprised.

"Yes, indeed. As Kerim did not have the means to support the adorable creature as she merited, he consented to divorce her so that I could marry her."

I was not overpleased. But what could I do? Submit to my fate. One cannot escape from it. It struck me again and forcibly. I did not breathe a word, but I followed Abdulla. Near the New Gate he took me into a very pretty house and led me to the *enderoun*.

There I found Leila seated on the rug. She received me graciously. Unfortunately for me, I found her prettier and more fascinating than ever and became choked with tears. She observed this, and after we had had tea and Abdulla left us alone to attend to some business affairs, she said:

"My poor Aga, you are quite unhappy."

"I am very unhappy," I answered, bowing my head.

"You must be sensible," she continued, "and I will hide nothing from you. I admit I loved you very much and I still love you, but I was also aware of Suleiman's good qualities; the gaiety and animation of Kerim enraptured me and I am full of esteem and

## *The War of the Turkomans*

tenderness for Abdulla's merits. If I were asked which of my four cousins I prefer, I would ask that all four might be one man, and that man I would be sure to love passionately for all time. But is that possible, I ask you? Do not weep. Be assured you will always live in my heart. I could not marry Suleiman, for he was penniless. I turned to you. You were a little fickle; I forgive you for it; I know you are devoted to me. Kerim was leading me straight along the road to destitution. Abdulla has made me rich. I must be prudent now and I will be true to him until death, though thinking of you as of three. . . . Well, I have told you enough. Abdulla is your cousin. Love him; serve him; he will do all that is possible for you. You know well that I shall not stand in the way of that."

At first, while she was saying these affectionate words, my sadness increased. But as nothing could be done about it and I understood her only too well, I resigned myself to be only the son of my uncle to Leila.

As a merchant, Abdulla often had dealings with important people. He did favours for them and had influence with them. Thanks to him, they made me sultan in the Khamseh or special regiment which always stays at Teheran, in the palace, mounting guard, carrying water, cutting wood, or working at masonry. So I became a captain and in turn began to live off



## *The War of the Turkomans*

the soldiers, as I, myself, had been dealt with. This gave me a much respected position and there are no complaints from me.

We are the King's guards. There has often been a question of giving us splendid uniforms and it is always being discussed. I think they will discuss it to the end of time. Sometimes it is suggested to dress us like the men who guard the Emperor of Russia, who, it seems, wear green with gold stripes and embroidery. Again they want to dress us in red, always with gold stripes, embroidery and fringes. But, dressed like that, how could the soldiers be of use? And who would pay for the beautiful costumes? While waiting for a way to be found, our people have only torn breeches and sometimes not even a cap.

When I became an officer, I wanted to live with my equals and made many acquaintances. Amongst them I grew very fond of a sultan, a fellow with a fine character. He had been sent to the Firenks to be educated, and had lived amongst them for a long time. He told me very strange things. One evening, when we had had a little more cold tea than usual, he expressed opinions which I thought perfectly reasonable.

"You see, brother," he said, "all the Iranians are brutes, and all the Europeans fools. I was brought up in Europe. First they sent me to a college and then, as I learned what was needed to pass the exami-

## *The War of the Turkomans*

nations as well as those cursed ones, I entered their military school called Saint-Cyr. I stayed there two years, as they do; then, having become an officer, I returned home. They wanted to make use of me. They asked me what was the right thing to do. I told them, and they made fun of me and hated me. They accused me of being an infidel and I was bastinadoed. At first I wanted to die because Europeans think such incidents are a dishonour."

"The simpletons!" I exclaimed, emptying my glass.

"Yes, they are simpletons; they do not understand at all that our customs, habits, interests, climate, air, soil, our past and our present, render radically impossible what is quite simple to them. When I saw that my death would accomplish nothing at all, I re-educated myself. I ceased having opinions, desiring to reform, to blame, to contradict, and I became like all of you. I kissed the hand of the pillars of power and I said 'Yes' to the most absurd things. Then they stopped persecuting me, but as they still distrust me I shall never be anything higher than a captain. We both know generals of fifteen years of age and field-m Marshals of eighteen. We also know brave warriors who do not know how to shoot a gun. I am past fifty and I shall die in want under the weight of an incurable suspicion, because I know how to command troops and what to do to make an end of the Turkomans of the frontier in three months. Cursed be these

## *The War of the Turkomans*

scoundrelly Europeans, the cause of all my misfortunes! Pass me the *raki*!”

That night we drank so well that I could only get up from the rug upon which I had fallen the next night, and I left my comrade still lying there.

Thanks to the protection of Abdulla, I may become a major this year, unless they make me a colonel. Inshallah! Inshallah!



*The Illustrious Magician*





## *The Illustrious Magician*



AGHER, the dervish, told the following story one day on the authority of Abdi-Khan, who had heard it from Loutfoulah Hindi, who had it from Riza-Bey of Kirmanshah, all well-known men of undoubted veracity.

A few years ago, at Damghan, there lived a young man called Mirza-Kassem. He was an excellent Muslim. Married a short while, he lived well with his charming wife. He did not drink wine or brandy, so that no noise from his home disturbed the neighbourhood, a circumstance, let it be said in passing, that ought to be more frequent amongst people illumined by the light of Islam, but God disposes as he pleases. Mirza-Kassem did not display any luxury and was not an extravagant spender. He spent very properly a revenue from two villages and an income, from a fairly

## *The Illustrious Magician*

large sum, held for him by respectable merchants. He practised no profession and, not being ambitious, nor concerned about becoming a great personage, he constantly refused to become a servant, for his well-known good character brought him tempting offers.

Having thus renounced being first minister, and as a man has to do something, he had become interested in intellectual subjects. In his youth, after having left school, he had studied theology in the beautiful new college of Kachan where, under the shade of magnificent trees, he had listened to the learned lessons of professors, not without merit, and had collected in his note-book quite a number of differing opinions of the best interpretations of the Holy Book. Jurisprudence had attracted him for a while, but its great learning, venerable as it was, did not appeal to his imagination. So that, after having moderately enjoyed questions like this: Does Imam Mehdi exist with or without consciousness of himself? he gradually withdrew from these delights of reflection and threatened to fall into a sad indolence, when chance brought him in touch with a person who exercised a decisive influence upon him.

It was an evening in Ramazan. Unfortunately, the faithful rarely observe with strictness the fast commanded by law at this consecrated time. It must also be admitted, however, that almost every one would like others to think he is fasting and, in this way, at

## *The Illustrious Magician*

least, appearances are preserved. So that it is precisely those men, without conscience, who have comfortably eaten their *pilav* in a corner, at the usual dinner-hour, who, when night comes, complain the loudest of a hunger that does not torment them, of a feebleness they do not feel, and who call most beseechingly for the sun to set. One must thank God and his Prophet that this edifying spectacle is abundantly repeated, at the holy season, in the cities of Iran.

One evening then, at the gate of the city, Mirza-Kassem and a dozen of his friends were seated on their heels before the tray of a melon merchant, awaiting the moment when the sun's disk, already approaching the horizon, would give them the pleasure of disappearing. At least half of these precise, conscientious persons, whose florid faces did not indicate privation, held well-lighted *kalias* in their hands, only waiting for the twilight to enfold the luminary in order to cram the end of the tube into their mouths and envelop themselves with a cloud of smoke.

"Go down! Go down!" piteously murmured the fat Ghulam-Ali, holding the cherished implement an inch away from his lips. "Go down, sun, son of a dog, may your father burn for the suffering you prolong for us!"

"Oh, Hasan! Oh, Hosain! saints, Imams! I swear

## *The Illustrious Magician*

the sun disappeared an hour ago," cried Kouli-Ali, the draper, in a mourning voice. "I do not know why we are so blind as not to see it is night!"

If it was night, as the good Muslims asserted, one could also see it was bright day. But his insinuation was not successful.

As for Mirza-Kassem, he was patient and said nothing. He was merely looking complacently at two hard-boiled eggs in front of him, when suddenly the cannon from the citadel was heard. Thenceforth, the sun had officially set; all the *kalian*s began to smoke together, and the shop, with its melons, hard-boiled eggs and cucumbers, was instantly raided; meanwhile the tea-merchants filled their glasses with the boiling liquid; the crowd possessed themselves of it eagerly; the glasses were emptied and filled; they sang, cried, laughed, pushed and shoved one another, and thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

Then a tall dervish, lean as stone, black as a mole, burned by a thousand suns, clothed only in blue breeches, the head bare, covered with a forest of untidy black hair, with blazing eyes and a savage, hard, severe expression, appeared and stood two steps from Mirza-Kassem. Over his shoulder he carried a stick of yellow copper, ending in intertwined snakes. At his side hung a coconut, called *Kuskul*, peculiar to his brotherhood. This man was so odd-looking even for a dervish that Mirza-Kassem's eyes involuntarily



### THE ILLUSTRIOUS MAGICIAN

Then a tall dervish, lean as stone, black as a mole,  
burned by a thousand suns . . .





## *The Illustrious Magician*

fastened upon him and could not glance away. The stranger, in turn, looked at the man who was staring at him.

"Greetings to you!" he said, in a soft, melodious voice—most unexpected from such a being.

"And greetings and blessings to you!" politely answered Mirza-Kassem.

"As your excellency can see, I am a poor wretch, less than a shadow, consecrated to serve God and the Imams. I have just arrived in this city and, if you can lodge me to-night, on your roof, in your stable, anywhere you like, I shall be grateful."

"You overwhelm me with such a favour!" answered Mirza-Kassem. "Deign to follow your slave. He will show you the way."

The dervish raised his hand to his forehead, as a sign of acquiescence, and followed his guide. Together they passed through several winding streets, where the dogs of the bazaar were beginning to collect. A few of the stores that had remained open were being closed. There were coloured lanterns at the doors of some of the tumble-down houses. The guards of the quarter chatted with the gossiping women who were washing their linen in the stream flowing in the centre of the street and causing most unpleasant surprises to the legs of absent-minded passers-by. The walk of the two new friends was not very long, for, at the end of about a quarter of an hour, Mirza-

## *The Illustrious Magician*

Kassem halted before a small pointed door in a stone wall. He raised the iron knocker and knocked three times. A negro slave opened the door and Mirza-Kassem brought the dervish into the house, giving him a cordial welcome.

He led him across the little court, about ten feet square, paved with large flat bricks, in the centre of which was an attractive basin tiled with the most beautiful azure-blue tiles and filled with fresh water. Around it were rose-bushes covered with pink flowers. Mounting a few steps, the dervish found himself in a medium-sized living-room, open and facing the rose-bushes. The walls were agreeably painted in red and blue, with gold and silver flowers. Chinese vases filled with hyacinths and anemones were in the corners. A fine Kurdish rug covered the floor and cushions of white India muslin, with red stripes, covered the low sofa, called *takht*, upon which Mirza-Kassem invited his guest to be seated.

The dervish followed the rules of good form. He protested against so much honour, pleading his unworthiness.

"I am only," he modestly repeated several times, "a very miserable dervish—a dog, less than dust, before Your Excellency's eyes. How can I have the audacity to so abuse your kindness?"

The dervish spoke in this manner, but there was such an air of distinction and of noticeable dignity

## *The Illustrious Magician*

in his whole person that honest Mirza-Kassem was intimidated and wondered whether he ought not humbly to ask pardon from such a man for having dared to bring him to his home. To himself he said: Who is this dervish? He has the air of a king and seems more fitted to command an army than to roam the highways.

Meanwhile, the dervish sat down. The little black slave brought the tea, but all the dervish would drink was half a glass of water. The *kalian* was then presented to him. The dervish refused it, saying his principles did not permit him the use of such superfluities, so that Mirza-Kassem, who would gladly have drawn a few savoury puffs, felt obliged to praise the zeal of the holy personage and send away the tempting pipe, saying he was not in the habit of smoking either. Was it true or not? God knows exactly whether it was! Amen.

Then the dervish began to speak as follows:

“Your excellency has deigned to shower me with kindnesses. I must tell you who I am. The kingdom of Dekkan, which you have surely heard spoken of, is one of the most powerful states of India. I was born there. I was the favourite and minister of the king for several years. It is enough to tell you that none of the useless things of life were lacking to me. I know from my own experience what a tiresome thing a large harem can be. I know the disgust of

## *The Illustrious Magician*

riches. I saw so many jewels flash that the passion for gazing at them did not last long, and as for the prince's favour, I know how to appreciate better than any philosopher the truth and value of their observations upon this subject. Judge, by what I have become!

"I did not stay in this false position many years. I retired to give myself up entirely to study. As a result of my studies, I again abandoned this position as too awkward and entailing too many worthless distractions. I left everything. I lived alone and was thereafter content with my *kuskul* and my blue cotton breeches. I can tell you a great truth which you will not believe, but which is, however, so. The poor wretch now before you, who owns nothing, possesses the world!"

Saying these words, the dervish looked straight at Mirza-Kassem with such an expression of majesty and authority that he was abashed and barely had time to pronounce the words appropriate to the occasion:

"Glory to God! May He be blessed for it and thanked for this!"

"No!" continued the dervish, and his whole being gradually became more imposing and dominating; "no, my son, you do not believe me! Power, in your eyes, is proclaimed by great pomp; one is not invested with it unless magnificently robed in silk,

## *The Illustrious Magician*

velvet, cashmere and gauzes, embroidered in gold and silver, and unless one moves on a horse whose harness is strewn with pearls and emeralds, surrounded by an immense retinue whose noisy, insolent manners proclaim their master's power. You think, in regard to this, as every one else thinks, but you have been kind to me; without knowing me, without suspecting in any way who I am, you have welcomed and received me like a king. I will show you my gratitude in delivering you from a false kind of thinking which shall not lower the mind of a man like you any longer. Know, that most things impossible to many men are easy and simple for me. I will give you an immediate proof. Take my hand and hold my fingers so that you can feel the pulse. What do you say of that?"

"The pulse," answered Mirza-Kassem, slightly astonished, "is beating quite regularly, in the normal way."

"Wait," said the dervish, bending his head and, in a lowered voice, as if he were concentrating all his faculties on what he was going to do, "wait, and the pulse will gradually stop."

"What are you saying?" cried Mirza-Kassem, extremely surprised. "No man can do that."

"It is what I am doing, however," answered the dervish with a smile.

And truly the pulse grew slower, little by little,

## *The Illustrious Magician*

and became so faint that Mirza-Kassem could hardly find it, and finally it stopped entirely. Mirza-Kassem was astounded.

"When you order it," said the dervish, "it will begin again."

"Make it begin again then!"

Several seconds passed, the pulse trembled again, throbbed and, little by little, resumed its natural beat. Mirza-Kassem looked at the dervish with divided feelings, partly of admiration and partly of fear.

"I have just shown you," said this odd personage who held him spellbound, "what I can do with myself. Now I will show you what I can do with the material world. Have a brazier brought in."

Mirza-Kassem told the small negro to bring forth what the dervish asked for, and a brazier, filled to the brim with lighted coals, was placed before him to use for a curious demonstration of his limitless power over the elements. The demonstration actually took place. The dervish seemed to gather himself together powerfully; he drew in his lips so tightly that they seemed to be soldered together, his eyes sank back farther into their sockets; beads of sweat were on his brow, his cheeks were drawn and became livid under the tan. All at once, he stretched out his arm, as if with a spring, and placed it in the midst of the coals, into which he pushed his closed fist. Mirza-



## *The Illustrious Magician*

Kassem cried out in dismay, but the thaumaturge smiled and kept his fist tightly closed in the midst of the fire. Two or three minutes passed. He withdrew his hand and showed it to his host, who observed that there was no burn or wound upon it.

"That is not all," said the dervish. "You know what I can do to control my body and make the elements obey. Now see what power I have over men—I say all men, all humanity!"

He pronounced these words so contemptuously that it sounded like an invective, and Mirza-Kassem was more and more perplexed. But the dervish took no notice of this and said to him:

"Have a piece of iron or lead brought to me."

They brought in ten bullets. He put them on the coals and they soon began to melt, all the more as he made the fire burn hotter by blowing on it. Then, from the black cotton belt which held up his trousers, he took a little tin box in which Mirza-Kassem saw some red powder. The dervish took a pinch and threw it on the lead. A few minutes later, leaning over, he said in a calm voice:

"It is done!"

Then he put a pale yellow ingot on the sofa before Mirza-Kassem, who perceived that it was gold.

"And see," cried the dervish triumphantly, "what power I have over men! Is that enough! Do I need splendours, magnificence, luxury, insolence? And you,

## *The Illustrious Magician*

my son, learn henceforth that power is not in that which makes a display of itself, but solely in the authority of strong souls—a thing the vulgar do not believe!”

“Alas, my father,” answered Mirza-Kassem in a voice trembling with emotion, “it is not even enough for souls to be strong to enjoy such sublime prerogatives; they must have known how to find them and take them. It requires knowledge!”

“And better than that,” replied the dervish, “it requires negation, maceration, complete submission of the body to the spirit, absolute purity of heart, and these qualities cannot be attained without pain and labour. But enough of this.”

“No, oh, no!” cried Kassem, fastening his eyes, burning with longing, upon his guest. “No! Since I have the good fortune to be at your feet, do not withdraw your instruction so quickly! Do not close the spring from which you have let me take one sip! Speak, my father, instruct me, teach me, I wish to know what to do! I will do it! I no longer desire to lead this useless, empty life which has been mine until now!”

Kassem was caught by the most dangerous of desires, that of knowledge. His sleeping instincts were awakened and would nevermore leave him a moment’s peace. The dervish then began to speak in a low voice. He, no doubt, revealed very strange things.

## *The Illustrious Magician*

The face of the listener was convulsed. The most varied and sudden changes of expression constantly passed over it. At times it expressed an unbounded admiration and a state almost of ecstasy. Kassem's eyes filled and he looked towards something hidden and intangible and it seemed as if he were going to faint, overcome by the most august and fascinating of all revelations. All at once, horror replaced his joy. Kassem's face was drawn, his mouth opened, he stared wide-eyed. He seemed to see a dreadful abyss, to be leaning over it, in danger of losing his balance and falling to the bottom. All night he listened to the discourse that produced such a terrible revolution in his soul and convulsed his thoughts. At last, dawn lighted up the roof and the dervish, who had tried in vain to get a little rest, insisted more emphatically this time and swore he would reveal no more.

Kassem, exhausted and out of breath, obeyed. The dervish was left alone in the room and lay down on the sofa, while he, anxious, and with faltering steps, crossed the narrow halls, descended, then mounted a few steps, raised a curtain and entered the *enderoun*. The negro was sleeping on the straw mat in the ante-room where the grey light of dawn feebly struggled with the smoky light of a small lamp on the floor which cast a red glow on the near-by objects, while the rest of the room was plunged into an almost black obscurity. From here the young man entered the room

## *The Illustrious Magician*

where his wife was peacefully sleeping in their spacious bed, covered with wide silks chequered in pink, green and yellow, like a Scotch plaid, revealing the grey India muslin sheet embroidered with varicoloured flowers. The many pillows in all shapes and sizes, some triangular, some square, others round, were crushed under the sleeper's head, supported her arms, or were scattered about.

Kassem gazed at pretty Amyneh a moment and sighed. Then, sad and preoccupied, he sat down in a corner of the room and remained there without moving.

He still held tightly squeezed in his hand the ingot which the Indian had given to him. From time to time, he looked at it—the sight of it intoxicated and exalted him. It was the material proof that the agitation in his mind was not based on a dream, it was a true and positive reality. He looked at the gold ingot, his eyes closed and all of a sudden, in a semi-drowsiness, it seemed to him that a piece of metal swelled in the palm of his hand, breathed, and was a living being. He awoke with a start, in indescribable anguish, again beholding the marvel he had come to possess. Seeing it as immovable as a piece of metal should be and closing his eyelids again, he slumbered, carried off into the turmoil of his thoughts. Finally, weariness conquered meditation and Kassem slept profoundly.

## *The Illustrious Magician*

He was awakened by a kiss on his brow. He looked up. Amyneh, on her knees at his side, clasped her arms around him and said:

"Are you ill, my soul? Why didn't you come to bed last night? Oh, holy Imams! Is he sick? What ails you, my life? Won't you speak to your slave?"

Kassem saw it was day and, returning his wife's kiss, answered:

"Blessings on you! I am not sick, thank God!"

"Thank God!" cried Amyneh.

"No, I am not sick."

"Then what did you do last night with that strange dervish? Did you drink brandy, contrary to your habits, or eat roasted melon-seeds to make you thirsty?"

"God forbid!" cried Kassem, "Nothing of the kind happened. We only spoke, very late, of his travels. . . . Where is he, my guest? I must go and join him."

As he was speaking, Kassem stood up, but Amyneh continued:

"It has been day for some time. The sun had barely risen when our negro Boulour saw the dervish crouching in the court near the fountain. He was saying his prayers and performing his prescribed ablutions. Then he cooked a little rice in a copper cup, threw a pinch of salt on it, ate it and left."

"How, left?" cried Kassem in consternation

## *The Illustrious Magician*

"How, left? That is impossible! He still has a thousand things of the utmost importance to teach me! It isn't possible that he left!"

"But he did," answered Amyneh, slightly astonished at her husband's agitation. "What affair did you have with that man?"

Kassem did not answer and, in a gloomy, irritated, abstracted manner, he went out of the room and left the house. He still held the gold ingot. He ran straight to the bazaar and went to a jeweller of his acquaintance.

"Greetings to you, Master Abdurrahman!" he said.

"And greetings to you, Mirza!" the merchant answered.

"Do me a favour; tell me what this metal is worth."

Master Abdurrahman put on his huge spectacles, examined the ingot, passed it through the test glass and peacefully answered:

"It is fine good gold, free from all alloy, and is worth about one hundred *tomans*. If you wish I will weigh it accurately and will give you the price, deducting a small profit."

"I thank you," replied Kassem, "but for the time being I am in no hurry to part with this object. I will have recourse to you at the right time."

"Whenever you like," answered the merchant.

He bowed to Kassem, who took leave of him.



## *The Illustrious Magician*

He went across the bazaars, brushing past the shops; the playful jokes of the women who, under their veils, allow themselves anything (every one knows how far they go), the calls, the compliments of his friends, the sharp warnings of the muleteers and camel-drivers to make way for their beasts which filed past interminably, attached to each other by their tails and loaded with bales that might fall on any of one's limbs, all these things that usually amused him, to-day bored him to irritation. It was imperative for him to be alone, to deliver himself to the thoughts that were mastering him and wished to possess him entirely. He left the city and went to a deserted place where there were a number of large ruined tombs. He went in under one of these tumble-down cupolas and sat down in a corner in the shade. Seated there, he gave himself up to his dominating thoughts, which had fallen upon him like a swarm of birds of prey.

In all the streets of our Iranian cities there are wells. Our streets are narrow and the well is in the centre. Since no one ever thought of building a wall around them as in European cities, they are open and level with the ground, which is much more convenient. When, for one reason or another, a well dries up, we do not amuse ourselves by filling it. This would take too much time and trouble. We cover it up with two or three boards and in time

## *The Illustrious Magician*

earth accumulates over it. Naturally, the planks rot. Clumsy feet cause them to give way, and everywhere but in our country passers-by, children, animals would fall into the hole instantly and be killed at the bottom. In our country this seldom happens because the very good God and very merciful Lord who has exempted us from thinking about many things takes care to save us from the vexatious consequences that our confidence in him might suffer. However, it cannot be sworn that no one ever disappears in the abyss. Kassem had a similar abyss in a corner of his brain. He did not know it himself. He had fallen into it. He was at the bottom, and greatly agitated, but he was never to get out.

Besides, he did not even think of it. Seized and held fast by that which had taken possession of his imagination, intelligence, heart and soul, and had mastered all his power, he did not dream of resisting it. And not only did he surrender himself, he passionately allowed himself to be consumed. In short, a single idea possessed him—to walk and walk resolutely in the path of his revealer.

What value had the world in the midst of which he had lived until now? None, absolutely none. It was physical mire, moral mire; in one word—nothingness. He wanted to rise high and soar about the universe, find out the secret of the forces that move all things—this universe, as well as many larger,

## *The Illustrious Magician*

braver, and more august ones. He knew that the primordial element could be isolated, dominated, transformed. The Indian could do it; he, Kassem, held the material proof in his hand, and he wished to do it also. He knew one could seize all motive and creative forces, even the most unsubdued, the most sublime; he desired this power. He knew one could live forever. Without doubt, no being dies. But he knew one could keep the actual life in the actual exterior without losing the present individuality. Very well, that is what he wished to attain. Then, in a moment of boundless enthusiasm and thinking of what he, Kassem, would become, he cried out:

“And I, I who am I, is it so hard for me to enter the sphere wherein I wish to exist hereafter that I keep holding this piece of gold in my fingers just as if in my eyes it were worth what I thought it was yesterday?”

He looked at it and threw it contemptuously into the ruins. But nothing can be acquired, except at a price proportionate to the worth of what one seeks, and that is what troubled him. That is what he was thinking about and continued to find very hard. But he did not fight against this passion that had been transformed into a duty, and, after having torn out of himself his last regrets, he rose, went towards his house, entered and appeared before his wife.

She rose to receive him and welcomed him, as

## *The Illustrious Magician*

usual, most lovingly. But, as she saw the gloomy expression and knitted brow of her husband, a most unaccustomed sight, her heart contracted and the poor child sat down silently beside him.

"Amyneh," said Kassem, "you know I love you, and never has greater affection united two souls. As for me—it is true, is it not?—the affection of my heart for yours is incomparable. This heart bleeds because it has to wound its companion."

"What is the matter with you? What do you want?" answered Amyneh, taking the hand that was not given to her.

"I say that every man has his destiny in life, his Kismet; this is planned long before his birth. It is all ready when he comes into the world, and whether he consents or resists he has to accept, take, and adjust himself to it."

"There is no doubt of that," said Amyneh in her knowing little way, "but your destiny is not so bad and you have no reason to frown like that when you think about it. I am your destiny. Now and then, more than once, and even frequently you have assured me that you could ask for no other."

Kassem, in spite of his gloom, could not help smiling at his sweet young wife. Seeing this, she leaned her elbows on her husband's knees and tried, in the way she looked at him, to allure him. She had often succeeded but this time she failed.

## *The Illustrious Magician*

"Amyneh," he said, "my destiny, my Kismet, is to go away this very day and leave you forever!"

"Forever! Leave me? Go away? That is not my wish!"

"Nor do I wish it! But it is my Kismet. It can't be helped. The dervish opened my eyes. I realized what Heaven calls me to. I have to go."

"Where? . . . Good God, merciful God, I shall go mad!"

And poor Amyneh twisted her arms and tears streamed from her eyes. Then she seized Kassem's arm and shouted:

"Speak! Speak! Where are you going?"

"I am going to join the dervish."

"Where is he?"

"He left for Khorassan, he will pass through Meshed and the country of Kabul. I will find him at last in the mountains of Banian."

"What do you need him for?"

"I need him and he needs me. I might as well tell you all."

"No doubt, you may as well tell me all. Ah, my God! my God! I am going out of my head! Speak, my love, my child, my life! Speak!"

Moved by grief, tenderness and pity, Kassem took Amyneh's hand, squeezed it and kept hold of it while he spoke as follows:

"The dervish can do everything—everything in the

## *The Illustrious Magician*

world. He proved it to me last night. He can do everything except one thing and, without a companion, he will never accomplish this. For many years he has sought this companion. He has traversed Persia, Arabia and Turkey to find him. He searched Egypt and beyond, Magreb, travelling through lands occupied by the Firenks, called French. Everywhere, he says, are people with narrow minds and wavering hearts. Most of them listened kindly while he spoke to them of the ways of making gold, but when he wished to elevate their minds they were no longer interested. The zealous ones cooled off. The dervish was not discouraged. He was certain that the man necessary for his design existed in the world—it was revealed to him by the infallible calculations of Raml, points thrown and combined on a sand table. Only he was ignorant of the place where this friend of his heart was to be found. He was going to look in Turkestan, when he passed through the city yesterday. He spoke to me and opened his whole heart to me. Mine is enlightened. It is all about me. I am the chosen one! I alone can solve the mystery. Behold me! I am ready! I have to leave. I leave! Dead or alive, I will help the dervish to extort the last secret.”

Kassem had spoken so enthusiastically, his last words were so full of conviction, of unshakable resolution, that Amyneh bowed her head, but as all this involved the annihilation of her happiness, she did



## *The Illustrious Magician*

not remain vanquished long and in turn spoke in a firm voice:

“And I?”

“You! You! What shall I say? I love you more than anything in the world, but I cannot help doing what I must do. A more terrible force than you can conceive of impels me in spite of the love I have for you. I must obey. . . . I do obey! I will send you back to your parents. . . . If I return . . . then . . . but will I return? What will become of me? Who can tell? Should I have any desire outside of my task? In the end, if I return . . .”

“If you return will you be mine?”

“Wholly!” Kassem answered, with a tenderness and warmth that proved love had not been extinguished by the new passion. “Yes, wholly! Forever! I will think only of you! But listen! It is very unlikely that I shall return! I am in the dark about everything I am doing. . . . Perhaps it will be wiser. . . . If you think so, I will ask for a divorce and you may take another husband. . . . You will have children. . . .”

Then Kassem cried most bitterly. Amyneh, in the midst of her grief, trembled with joy and even hope and answered:

“No, I will not consent to a divorce. I will wait for you, one, two, three, ten years . . . till death. Till my death, do you hear? And that will be sooner

## *The Illustrious Magician*

if you die. I do not want to go back to my parents either. I know them. They will think I am unhappy, not because of your absence, but from being alone. They will want me to marry again. I will go and live with your sister, and there you will join me as soon as you can."

Kassem dried his eyes, embraced Amyneh and rested his head for some time against the faithful heart from which he was to part. The silence was only broken by sobs and deep sighs. Finally, Amyneh asked, in a low voice:

"When are you going to leave?"

"To-night," answered Kassem.

"No, grant me this one night and leave to-morrow. I will go and tell your sister about it. To-morrow you will help me to have everything moved to her house; after you have seen me installed there, then—you will leave me. . . . But I would like you to think of me there, so that when you are far away you can see me, in your thoughts, my clothes, my room, and all my surroundings!"

And she wept again, but more softly. Then, realizing that she had no time to lose, she left her husband's side, drew over her feet the wide trousers that women wear in the street, wrapped herself in a big *hyader* (a coat of blue cotton), covering the whole body and fastened with two dove-shaped gold brooches, incrustated with garnets, the *rubend* (a thick

## *The Illustrious Magician*

muslin veil slit over the eyes with a criss-cross opening), and, ready for the street, she squeezed her prostrated husband's hand again and went out.

When she reached the street, her heart was so full and she felt so unhappy and abandoned that it would have taken little for her to cry out and implore the pity of the passer-by. She might have done this and all would have sympathized with her, but she changed her mind while passing the mosque.

She entered here and said her prayers. She recited with passionate volubility a goodly number of *rikaats* and told her beads, more than ten times, fervently repeating the ninety names of the merciful God.

After an hour spent in this way, the young woman left. At the door, she saw the sick poor assembled around the fountain. She gave them alms and went out, covered with blessings.

All those formulas: "Blessings upon you!" "May God grant you perfect happiness!" "May you have your fill of all good things, you and yours!" and others of the like sounded like music in the ears of the poor sufferer and she said to herself that perhaps God would pity her. She met some horsemen; they passed, surrounding a stately personage mounted on a fine horse. She approached humbly and begged alms. They could see from her coat of fine stuff, her dazzling white *rubend*, and her little new slippers of green shagreen, that it was not from want she stretched out

## *The Illustrious Magician*

her hand, and the warriors and the old nobleman, knowing she did it to humiliate herself before God and to obtain grace, placed a small coin in the outstretched hand, modestly wrapped in a corner of the cloak, and each accompanied his offering with a kindly nod of the head and a propitiatory formula. Amyneh, having done what she could to conciliate the divine Goodness and Indulgence, directed her steps towards her sister-in-law's house and soon arrived there.

This sister-in-law was no ordinary character. She deserves to have her portrait drawn. She was called by the name of Zemroud-Hanum, Madame Emerald. She was at least ten years older than Kassem and had been a mother to him. Consequently, he had a profound regard and great respect for her, all combined with a little fear, a sentiment I mention last and that was shared to the highest degree by Aziz-Khan, the lady's husband. Zemroud-Hanum was not one to weaken where her convictions were concerned. She had married, as a second wife, the general, her husband, and it had taken her six months to have the first one sent away, but she had succeeded. Since then, Aziz-Khan had tried several times to make her understand the palpable truth that a man of his rank and fortune was wrong in having only one person consecrated within his *enderoun*, that is to say, in possessing only one wife, like an ordinary middle-class person. She would not hear of any innovation of this

## *The Illustrious Magician*

kind, and the verve with which she dealt blows and sometimes even lashes with the tube of the *kalian* to the maid- and men-servants gave Aziz-Khan food for thought. He avoided compromising his beard and dignity in discussions whose end could not be foreseen. When he was out of humour, he did not come home, but went for a walk in the bazaar.

Absolutely mistress of the fort, venerated, feared, surrounded by a flock of eight children, the eldest a boy of fifteen, she ran everything in an orderly, quiet way and with praiseworthy consideration. Zemroud-Hanum was an excellent woman. She was quickly angered and promptly sorry. In anger her voice was the sharpest in the quarter, but it was sometimes the softest when she tried to console some one. She was as generous as a sultan, charitable as a prophet and, besides, extraordinarily pretty, and she was almost forty years old. She was full of wit, made charming verses, played the *tar* to such perfection that her husband, when she deigned to play for him, would rock his head back and forth for a quarter of an hour and murmur, "Excellent, excellent, excellent" in ecstasy, and end by weeping and knocking his head against the wall.

When Amyneh entered her sister-in-law's drawing-room, she found guests there, as two pairs of slippers, just like her own, in front of the door had indicated. The two ladies, who were seated on the cushions,

## *The Illustrious Magician*

were no less than Bulbul-Hanum (Madame Nightingale) and Loulou-Hanum (Madame Pearl), one the third wife of the governor, the other the only wife of the head priest, the young and amiable Molla-Sadek, the most enlightened authority on pastry in all Damghan. These ladies were both pretty, very elegant and very serious. As Zemroud-Hanum was never inclined to be gloomy unless forced to be so by opposition, the conversation went along smoothly. They talked of the new fashions, dress, children's health, the peculiarities of husbands, and even the transports of these gentlemen, a subject that always holds an important place in feminine confidences, as the surest means of showing how their merits are appreciated, and, finally, gossip, gossip, gossip. This salt, pepper and allspice, this *ne plus ultra* of social delight, in short, everything that could be said and especially everything that should have been left unsaid, was going in good order, and the bursts of laughter only stopped to begin again.

Three servants, two of them Baluchis and one a negress, dressed in silk and cashmere, brought in *kalian*s of gold, enamelled and decorated with jewels, and the ladies were smoking happily when the sorrowful Amyneh entered. As a rule, she was a worthy associate in discussions of this kind—she brought such gaiety with her and such a fresh, pretty laugh that songs composed about Amyneh's laugh had been sung



## *The Illustrious Magician*

everywhere. Alas, there was no question of Amyneh's laugh to-day! The poor little thing dropped her cloak and veil, kissed the hand of her sister-in-law who kissed her tenderly on the eyes, and sat down, after having greeted the two ladies as friends.

"Good heavens, little daughter," cried Zemroud-Hanum, "what is the matter? Red eyes? Have you been crying by any chance? Is it Kassem's fault? If so, send him to me. I will put him back on the right path. Oh, these men, these men! That is what we were just saying! But console yourself, console yourself! You mustn't spoil your beautiful eyes!"

"Spoil one's eyes for a husband!" said Loulou, the elegant wife of the ecclesiastical dignitary. "What folly! By the way, dear Amyneh, my soul, my eyes, perhaps you can tell me particulars of what happened yesterday between Gulnar-Hanum and her husband. It seems there was a frightful scene!"

"I don't know anything about it," answered Amyneh, very low, wiping her eyes and smothering a sigh.

"I know the story to the last detail," cried the governor's consort, who had long, black, almond-shaped eyes and a goodly portion of surmeh on her lashes that gave them an unnatural brightness. "It seems that, in a moment of effusion, Said-Hosain wanted to look at his wife's ears."

"How horrible!" cried Zemroud and Loulou in one voice.

## *The Illustrious Magician*

"A gross vulgarity!" continued Bulbul, shrugging her shoulder with an incomparable expression of prudery. "But that was what he wanted, and although Gulnar defended herself and was even angry Said-Hosain finally disarranged her *tchargat* and caught a glimpse of the tip of her right ear and, on that ear, an earring of gold and sapphires that he did not remember to have given her. Then there was a great row, as you can imagine."

"But Gulnar-Hanum is very imprudent!" declared Loulou. "How can one wear such earrings if one is not sure of one's husband's morality? My husband would never permit himself . . ."

"Gulnar," replied Bulbul, "thought she was safe, because she wore other earrings, inoffensive ones, in the ordinary way, not on her ears, but attached to her *tchargat*, just as we do."

"By the way," interrupted Loulou, "since we are speaking of styles . . ."

Here *kalian*s and tea were brought in again and Amyneh hoped, with reason, that, the first having been smoked and the last drunk, the visit would soon end. While each of these beautiful ladies held a cup in her hand, Loulou continued her story:

"Since we are speaking of styles, I say, have you seen the new-shaped vest the Armenians brought from Teheran? It seems all the women are mad about them because it is what the Europeans wear under their

## *The Illustrious Magician*

coats. They're called *yiletkehs*. I ordered three for myself. . . ."

"I only ordered two," said Bulbul, "one in gold cloth and one in silver stuff with red flowers. They are very convenient for nursing."

The conversation continued for some time in this fashion. Then the two ladies took their leave, embracing Zemroud and Amyneh, and with them went the men- and maid-servants and the *kaliares*, with the bustle proper to important people.

At last Amyneh was free to tell what burdened her heart. She did so passionately and Zemroud, beside herself with indignation, anger and, at the same time, fear and curiosity at such an astonishing case, said, as she took her coat and veil:

"Stay here, my daughter. I'll go and speak to Kassem, and I promise you. . . . Stay here, wait for me and above everything don't grieve. That boy is my brother but I think of him as my son. I brought him up and it was I who arranged his marriage. Your father was most generous to him. He used the two hundred *tomans* that Kassem gave for you, half of which my husband lent him, entirely for your wedding outfit, and even spent more besides. Vallah! Billah! Tallah! We'll see how Master Kassem will answer me! Calm yourself! I tell you, and you may be assured, this is nothing."

Thereupon, Zemroud-Hanum, armed for war and

## *The Illustrious Magician*

thoroughly shrouded, taking no man- or maid-servant with her, left like a streak of lightning flashing through a stormy sky, lighting up the majestic horror of the storm.

Amyneh remained seated on the rug, in the deepest dejection, scarcely hearing the voice of hope that tried to awaken a response in her heart. She waited two full hours. Then Zemroud returned. She took off her veils. She was disconcerted and pale and one could see that this strong woman had wept. She sat down beside Amyneh and took her hand, and, seeing she did not say a word, or raise her eyes, but stared fixedly into space, she drew her to her heart, covered her with kisses, and said:

“We are very unhappy!”

They were indeed unhappy. Kassem had been very gentle with his elder sister and full of deference, but he was immovable in his resolve to leave the next day. He had only granted a delay, he said, in consideration of the tender love he bore Amyneh, and if they were going to torment him and subject him to complaints, which his own grief made unbearable, he would leave that very night and all supplications, arguments, and reproaches of Zemroud could not change him.

“He is bewitched, my soul,” said Zemroud, ending the story of her unsuccessful mission, “bewitched by

## *The Illustrious Magician*

that horrible magician. People like that have an irresistible power and when they command there is nothing to do but obey. Kassem is in his power. We must hope and even believe it is for his good, for, according to what he told me, the dervish seems to have the best and most warm-hearted intentions. He is a pious man and incapable of evil. I have known magicians myself. They were the most venerable people in the world, marvels of knowledge! So, I repeat, calm yourself! It is better for your husband to do great and powerful deeds under the Indian's protection, than, for instance, to go to war, where even the king's favour—may his greatness increase and be strengthened—could never prevent him from being badly wounded."

Such was the sort of consolation that Zemrout lavished on her little sister-in-law—worth much or little, it matters not. She had no other to offer and she used it in various forms, always ending each demonstration with the firm assurance, by promise or oath, that, in any case, Kassem would not stay away more than a year and that it was only reasonable and natural to suppose he would return with a huge fortune, which would enable each and every member of the family to gratify his whims. In the end, Amyneh, having gained some control over herself, said she wished to return home.

## *The Illustrious Magician*

There she found Kassem in a state of mind no better than her own. At the moment of leaving his wife, his house, habits, happiness, and love, his enthusiasm waned. His resolve was firm because he could not tear it from his imagination or his will, but it was veiled in black and his heart was wrung with sighs and entreaties. In short, Kassem was very unhappy, as any man is when, placed between duty and love, he feels he must follow the lead of duty. It does not help to try to understand the meaning of this last word. Kassem admitted his duty was to find and join the magician. He had to submit.

With the fine, tender, divine sentiment that belongs to women in all countries, when they are in love, and which in itself would be sufficient to make them the celestial beings of the universe, Amyneh understood the struggle that was going on in her husband's soul and instinctively avoided anything that would make it more difficult and cruel for the sufferer.

"Perhaps," she thought, "I could keep him beside me for eight days, or even a month, but how he would suffer! And, in the end? . . . What then? He would still want to go!"

She ceased struggling and resigned herself. She only said:

"You will come back?"

"Yes, yes, I shall come back! I swear it to you,



## *The Illustrious Magician*

Amyneh! How could I stay away? Be assured, if you don't see me again, it will be because . . ."

She put her hand over his mouth.

"I will see you again," said the best of wives, making her voice sound positive. "Surely I will see you again! Think of me, won't you?"

"Yes, I shall think of you, I shall think of you always! Oh, Amyneh, my Amyneh, my darling! How do you expect me not to be always thinking of you? Just think what you mean to me! Did I really know it until now? . . . I never thought I could lose you . . . lose you . . . Shall I lose you?"

"No! You will not lose me. I shall be there, quietly, at your sister's. I shall have a great deal of patience, a great deal of courage . . . I am sure nothing will happen to you, Kassem! Put your head on my knees once more."

The night passed. Between the most poignant despair and the most loving caresses, they consoled each other. Amyneh was the more courageous of the two over the misfortune that fate had inflicted upon them.

When the day dawned, she called the servants and ordered them to lift the rugs, put all the things in chests and empty the house. She sent for the mules and had her belongings taken to Zemroud-Hanum's house. The neighbors, awakened by the commotion, came out of their houses as from an ant-hill. Some

## *The Illustrious Magician*

were at their doors, some in the street, or seated under the porticos of the shops, and many had climbed up to their roofs. There was a crowd. When Amyneh saw there was nothing left in the house and that the four walls of each room were bare, she wrapped herself in her veils and left. Kassem followed her, returning in an hour. He was alone with the little negro slave, who had been waiting for him. The slave then went and lighted a big fire in the centre of the largest square in the quarter, and when the pyre flamed up high Kassem in turn appeared in the street.

His head and chest, feet and legs were bare and he wore only a pair of white cotton breeches. In his hand he held the garments he had worn the day before, red silk trousers, a *kulijah* of grey German cloth, with black braid, a *djube*h of cloth of Verman, red with flowers, and a very fine sheepskin cap. He walked up to the pyre and threw in all these garments, which were consumed before his eyes.

Thus he performed the vow of poverty and asceticism. The crowd watched, deeply moved. They loved him. That was not surprising. They had known him from the time he was little; he was young, he was handsome; until then he had always been happy and had been kind to some and very charitable to others. The women wept, and a few cried out, shook their arms, and said: "What a misfortune! What a misfortune!" In their hearts they were deeply edified. In the

## *The Illustrious Magician*

eyes of those to whom the servants had explained the affair, Kassem was a slave, dedicated to study and self-denial, and nothing could be more beautiful.

When the sacrifice was ended, the new dervish shouted in a strident voice, like his fellow-dervishes: "Hou!"

This means "He," the Supreme Being, God, who holds in his bosom and preserves there everything that is living. Blessings burst forth:

"God protect you! May the holy Imams watch over you! O God! O God! Take care of him! May the prophets accompany him!"

With a bow Kassem thanked them and left the square. As he reached the street leading out of the city, an old *bakkal*, or grocer, handed him a small copper cup, begging him to accept it in remembrance of him. He did so. A few steps farther on, the five-year-old child of the carpenter, whom he had often petted, approached him, sent by his father, dragging a big stick for travelling. Kassem accepted this too. But his firmness faltered an instant. He could not control his sobs and convulsively seized the child in his arms. It was a bitter reminder of what he was losing. However, he soon controlled himself and, walking with long strides, was shortly out of the city. He went towards the East, towards Khorassan, where he felt the Indian waited for him and called him.

As soon as he was in the desert, walking along and

## *The Illustrious Magician*

striking the stones in the road with his stick, he felt he was free in the vast world and his heart grew calmer. His spirit was elated, and already he saw himself master, absolute master, of all the glorious secrets the Indian had told him about and promised to reveal. There was nothing base or greedy in his enthusiasm. He did not wish to control men through the power of magic or to possess great riches through the transmutation of metals. He desired wisdom, he desired to penetrate into the highest mysteries of nature. He saw himself, transfigured, above desires and needs. He saw himself an ascetic, lacking in no moral attributes or intellectual perfections, placed by his knowledge and utter disdain of terrestrial things in the very bosom of Divinity, and he became joint sharer in a limitless felicity. To reach this point, he had feared many struggles and horrible conflicts with his worldly affections. But it was not at all so: he was astonished at the facility with which he had taken leave of Amyneh, whom he had idolized up to the day before, and when he saw himself with a light and free heart, almost indifferent to the loss he had inflicted upon himself, he understood and admired the profound wisdom of the Indian dervish. For, when Kassem had insisted it was impossible for him to part from his young wife, he had predicted exactly the indifference which he was then feeling.

“The human passions,” the sage had said, “are not

## *The Illustrious Magician*

so strong or hard to break as is generally thought. Inexhaustible in their essence, they only seem powerful, and, when violently trampled upon, they first groan and are then silent, and like shadows they soon vanish before an inexorable will. Who can doubt it? Feeble souls; but we who are made to rule the world, and a few others, especially our kind, know that it is so. Quit your house, go away, and your head, released from bothersome anxieties, will no sooner be in the free air than you will be astonished at the fears, the ghosts which your imagination now sees and which will not even dare to assail you."

And it was so. Kassem only thought of Amyneh as a far-away dream, having no effect on the mind, and altogether, as was just said, he devoted himself to his great ideas and felt he was floating on their wings. He was calm and happy.

Eight days passed like this. Every evening he entered a village and sat down under a tree shading the principal square. The oldest peasants and the Molla, sometimes one or more dervishes, travellers like himself, sat with him, and a part of the night was spent in conversations on most varied subjects. Sometimes it was stories of travels, sometimes of battles; often the most difficult metaphysical questions agitated these rustic brains, as is customary everywhere in the Orient, and they gladly listened to Kassem, for they saw he had studied. As for the necessities of life, he found

## *The Illustrious Magician*

without difficulty everywhere a mat to sleep on and his share of *pilav*. He inquired about the dervish whom he was seeking. He had been seen passing by. He thought he could easily overtake the Indian, who was not far ahead of him.

On the ninth day of his trip, he was going along briskly, as usual, and looking without boredom or fatigue at the infinite stretch of stony, undulating desert cut by ravines, rocks and hillocks and bordered afar off, on the horizon, by two magnificent mountain ranges coloured like jewels by the play of light, when he felt in the depths of his soul an unexpected compassion, a spontaneous emotion, a grief, a call. His soul turned over within him and said to him:

“Amyneh!”

It was said very low. Nevertheless, he heard it and his heart heard it, and, with his heart, all the fibres of his being, the echoes in his memory, his feelings, his reason, his imagination and thoughts, all these awakened passionately and called:

“Amyneh!”

It was like children calling for their mother, like unfortunates submerged in the floods of a deluge when they raise their arms to heaven and weeping cry:

“Save us!”

Kassem was truly surprised! Indeed, he was surprised! He thought the past had entirely disappeared. Not at all; the past was right there before him, clam-



## *The Illustrious Magician*

orous, arrogant, claiming its right, its prey, claiming him, Kassem, and he heard as it were a menacing murmur:

“What have you to do with learning? What do you want of supreme power? How do magic and the domination of worlds concern you? You belong to love! You are the slave of love! Slave escaped from love, return to your master!”

And, as Kassem continued on his way with lowered head, the almost inseparable companion of profound love, its avenging companion, caught up with him and an irresistible sadness possessed him, just as when the darkness of night invades the countryside at evening.

Though the young man struggled, he was caught and caught again. He had thought it was only a matter of loving Amyneh and leaving her. But love had fooled him. He kept repeating to himself:

“Pass on is nothing; it falls down when you look squarely at it!”

He looked squarely at it; it did not fall down. It mastered him and he felt himself weakening, weakening, weakening, and he bowed before it. He wanted to drive it out, but who was the master within him? Love or he? It was love, and love kept repeating untiringly:

“Amyneh!”

And this voice and these supplicating, irritating, ob-

## *The Illustrious Magician*

stinate, all-powerful voices did not cease, and Kassem heard nothing within himself but the words:

“Amyneh! My Amyneh!”

What should he do? What he did. He held on and continued to walk. He went straight forward—he had lost all his spirit, exaltation, hopes, and even the relish of his hopes, and he was consumed by the bitterness of a profound and irremediable sorrow. At each step, he felt he was going further, not from his happiness, but from the source of his life—his existence was heavier, stifled, painful, struggling, less precious and less desirable to him. Just the same the poor lover walked on.

“I cannot turn back. I have promised; I made a vow to join the Indian. I must know his secrets. Oh, Amyneh! My Amyneh! My dear, my beloved Amyneh!”

It is very unfortunate that men who are endowed with a great deal of imagination and heart are not placed by destiny under a rule of only wanting one thing at a time. How well off they would be! How liberally they would give themselves, without reserve, scruple or worry, to the sole passion that sways them! Unfortunately, Heaven always imposes many tasks upon them. No doubt because they see more and better than others, their thoughts have penetrated into many places, they like this and that. Like Kassem, they want to possess ineffable secrets and, like him, they love a woman at the same time that they love

## *The Illustrious Magician*

knowledge and cannot love with moderation and calm, which would rectify all. No, to their misfortune, men like Kassem can do nothing by halves and always demand from themselves the absolute. They are almost always profoundly unhappy because of their inability to attain everything at once.

If only he had the assurance which his sister Zemroud had tried to instil in Amyneh—of coming back in a year, two years. . . . But no! He could not admit this as a possible consolation. He knew that, once in the hands of the Indian dervish, he would practise this rule of conduct forever. Knowledge is long and life is short. All that the pictures of the past showed him was over—his happiness was extinguished.

“In the end, I shall grow old,” he said; “I shall grow old and forget Amyneh.”

This idea hurt him more than all the rest together. He preferred suffering, he preferred being tortured by pain till he was dead. He did not want to forget. That would be to renounce himself, to destroy himself, to give way to a Kassem whom he did not know and deeply hated.

He tried to calm himself by thinking of the fine things he was going to learn and the marvels he would see every day, which he was convinced would greatly surpass the magnificence and the most brilliant of terrestrial things, even, he said very softly to himself, Amyneh’s beauty.

## *The Illustrious Magician*

This suggestion of his mind horrified him and a voice in his soul answered bitterly:

"And Amyneh's tenderness, is there anything in highest heaven above the value of this?"

Kassem was as utterly unhappy as a man can be, as depressed and sad. He made ardent vows to catch up with the dervish as soon as possible, for he was so discouraged that, now and then, he fell to the ground and sobbed aloud.

"When he is with me," he thought, "I shall be diverted and shall think of what he is telling me. He will bring me to the august contemplation of truth. I shall not be happy, but shall find courage again, for I must have it. My destiny is to serve the great plans of the Master. I submit to my destiny."

In the bottom of his soul, nothing interested him at all. Torn by two passions, he suffered so much that his only wish was to have a moment's respite, to experience calm and enjoy peace. As the days passed, he realized that he was dreaming so much of impossible things that he no longer even knew what could make him happy. Amyneh! She was so far away! She drew further away every day. He had lost her; this idolized image was drowned in his tears; he could not see her well; thanks to his regretting her, desiring and calling her, thanks to his weeping and not being able to reach her, she seemed no longer to exist in his world, to have any reality on earth. He no longer dared to believe in

## *The Illustrious Magician*

the possibility of ever taking her back again and, as for the love of knowledge, first and only cause of his grief, he was no longer sure that he still felt it.

But there he was mistaken. The words of the dervish had made him a slave to poignant curiosity and this had a tighter hold on him than he realized. In his abandon, in his loneliness, he could not understand why love, anger, and suffering did not cease from causing him pain. He should have known that, although this love was able to torture him, it was not absolutely victorious; for, after all and in spite of all, Kassem, urged on by this goad, did not retrace his steps. He kept on walking, but not towards Amyneh; he walked to find the dervish and seemed to have a chain around his neck that was pulling him. This chain was his Kismet, his Destiny. He dragged himself along, in spite of himself, his feelings, desires, heart, passion, and everything. He walked on and could not keep himself from doing it.

Most strange of all was it that, at bottom, he was far from knowing what he was seeking and even less what he was expecting. The Indian had only proved to him and assured him of his need for him. He had been swayed by his excited head and his suddenly inflamed imagination. He wanted to see, to serve. He vaguely saw pinnacles and depths so stupendous as to make him dizzy. He wanted to fling himself into the arms and around the neck of this gigantic genius whose

## *The Illustrious Magician*

eyes, staring into his soul, fascinated him; and, once on this terrible bosom, he did not know what would happen to him, though he did not even try to foresee it. This would be yielding to the ecstasy which he resisted.

I do not know whether passionate love ever admits any other passion as a worthy rival, but if there is one to whom it accords or allows this title without being too indignant it must be the very one that was clasping Kassem convulsively in its arms. Exaltation for exaltation, frenzy for frenzy, they equal each other; there is in each the same abnegation, the same discernment, perhaps even the same blindness, and if love can boast of carrying the soul above earthly vulgarities into the azure levels of desire, its rival, which possessed Kassem's soul at the same time as love, can truthfully answer that her power leads to equally sublime heights. Thus the unhappy lover traversed this stony country, bare of all vegetation, burned by the inexorable sun, and always, before his heedless eyes, lay the huge unchanging circle of the horizon. He went on, suffering, weeping, feeling that he was dying, but he went on just the same.

He walked far, but he did not reach his Master. For fifteen days he had lost all trace of him. He had asked and asked the villagers and travellers. No one had seen the Indian. They did not know him. No doubt, at a certain point, Kassem had taken a different direc-



## *The Illustrious Magician*

tion—not surprising in a country where there were no actual roads. But Kassem recognized the power of his Kismet in this.

“If I had met my Master,” he bitterly said to himself, “in the first days of my grief, I could not have hidden it from him. He would have rebuked me roughly and I would have gained nothing from this imprudent confidence but constant reproaches and, perhaps . . . what, perhaps? . . . Very surely a distrust which, without giving me back Amyneh, would have kept me away, for years, from the sanctuary of knowledge of which I would have been declared unworthy. Now, I am no longer master of myself because I am much unhappier and, having touched the lowest depths of my misfortune, I am as if prostrated and do not even think of extricating myself! No! I shall not say a word to the Indian! I shall not show him my secret. He would not understand it! His soul is hard and closed to everything but the sublimity for which he searches. He is already God. I, alas, what am I? Oh, alas! What am I?”

Kassem crossed through many lands, deserted and inhabited places. Here he was humanely received, there badly. He entered cities; he traversed the streets of Herat and those of the great Kabul, but he was profoundly indifferent to them all. In reality, it could not be said that he was alive. The double exaltation that swept and destroyed his being did not let him fall

## *The Illustrious Magician*

for an instant to the level of common interests. He travelled on, but he was dreaming and only seeing his dreams. It was a wonder that his feet touched the earth, for he was not on the earth at all. When he reached Kabul, without stopping, as I have just said, to visit the sights of the famous city which, as every one knows, has houses of several stories built of stone, he hastened on, and after several days, he reached the caves of Banian where he was certain he would find the dervish. And in fact, as he entered one of the grottoes, after having visited two or three, he caught sight of his Master seated on a stone, tracing lines with the end of his staff, the learned combinations of which showed that it was a work of divination.

Without turning his head, the Indian called out, in the melodious voice so striking in him:

“May the very high God be praised! He has given his servants means whereby they are never surprised! Come here, my soul. It is precisely at this moment of the day that you were to arrive! You arrive, here you are! I praise the elevation of your feelings and your heart—my calculations show them to me and I cannot doubt them. From you I expect all that is good, virtuous and helpful; however, I cannot tell you how many inexplicable obstacles have arisen in the way of our work.”

Kassem advanced modestly and kissed the sage's

## *The Illustrious Magician*

hand. But he was concentrating on his thoughts, did not raise his eyes, and continued to look fixedly at the combinations of lines that he had traced on the sand and was changing as he studied them. The young man looked at him with a kind of melancholy pleasure. He was no longer alone. He was near a being who, in his way, loved him, esteemed him and counted on him. He would gladly have embraced the dervish, thrown himself on his neck, pressed his doleful heart against him, but there was no possibility of anything of the kind. Kassem relinquished the idea, almost smiling at himself. He was contented to look at the Master silently and with tender affection, without trying to interrupt his meditations, for without understanding them he admired their profundity. Finally, however, the Indian raised his head and gazed fixedly at his companion.

"It is the hour; we are at the appointed place; we will begin our work. Let us hope for all, whatever it may be!"

"What are you seeking?" Kassem asked. "What are you waiting for? What do you want?"

"I do not know," answered the Indian. "What I want is what I do not know. What I know is prodigious. I want more than that. I need the last word. When I have it, you shall share it, and without having to traverse the numberless ways I have followed you

## *The Illustrious Magician*

shall have everything, without my suffering, or my anguish, my sorrows, doubts, and despairs. Do you understand? Are you pleased?"

Kassem trembled.

"Without despairs?" he said to himself. "Is that true? Will I not have paid as much as he?"

However, he was carried away by his Master's words. His heart was stirred and leapt within him. He too hoped. He was touching one of the goals of his life. For an instant he forgot the other.

"Come on!" he cried with a will. "Let us go forward! I will follow you! I am ready!"

"You are not afraid?" murmured the dervish.

"Of nothing in the world!" answered Kassem. In truth, life consisted of all the things for which he least cared.

The dervish rose and walked into the grotto. Kassem followed him. They went down into the depths of the earth. Soon daylight left them. They went forward into the twilight and then into darkness. Neither spoke a word. After a while, Kassem felt the bare rock under his outstretched hands and felt the dervish sounding it with his fingers. Around them were blocks of stone, thrown there by subterranean landslides, over which they had climbed. The dervish sighed deeply, drew his breath and sighed again. Kassem thought his master was trying to displace the rocks. All of a sudden, he felt himself powerfully grasped

## *The Illustrious Magician*

by the wrist. The dervish dragged him along violently and led him to a place where there was a strip of light.

"There is something in you," he cried, "which prevents our succeeding. I see it now, I know it, I am sure of it! You are honest, devoted, good, and faithful! But there is something! I don't know what! You are not wholly devoted to the holy work. Speak! Confess!"

"It is true," said Kassem, trembling. "It is true; forgive me. I am not what I ought to be."

"What is it?" cried the dervish, clenching his teeth. "Do not hide anything from me, my son, I have to know all to be able to remedy it. Do not be afraid to speak!"

Kassem hesitated a moment. He was very pale. He realized he must not hesitate. He was not in the presence of the world, but of the formidable infinite.

"I am in love," he said.

"What?"

"Amyneh!"

"Ah, unfortunate one!"

The Indian wrung his hands and was absorbed in a grief too profound for words. Finally, he made an effort.

"You will not be able to help me much," he said. "Your goodwill is paralyzed. A free soul is needed here. Yours is not. However, you are free from all evil; you were the one I needed. . . . You still can do

## *The Illustrious Magician*

something. . . . As for me . . . I will not draw back! I will have all! . . . I will have what I want! . . . But at what a price! For you, you will have nothing! Nothing! Do you hear? . . . It is not my fault and it is not yours! . . . Ah! woman! . . . woman! . . . Cursed be women! They ruin everything! However, let us turn back, for in a quarter of an hour it will be too late!"

As he spoke these last words, a voice called at the entrance to the cave:

"Come, Kassem, come!"

Kassem shivered from head to foot. He seemed to recognize that voice. But the Indian seized him with a powerful grip and, half drawing, half forcing him on, called to him:

"Do not listen, or all is lost!"

Again the voice was heard:

"Come, Kassem, come!"

Kassem was beside himself. He recognized the voice perfectly, but the voice of his Master kept drawing him on and calling:

"Do not turn round! Do not listen! Follow me! I know I am going to die! But at least, at least, I hope that in dying I shall find out!"

Kassem let himself be carried off. He followed, he was drawn along. He did not resist. His affection for his Master and a feverish, furious curiosity dominated him. He knew who was calling him, he had no other



## *The Illustrious Magician*

will than to confront this terrible mystery. All of a sudden he found himself against the rock, the very spot his hands had touched a few moments before.

"Stand there," said the Indian, pushing him into a sort of cavity. "There! There! Good! . . . You run less risk, and now, I know it, I feel it, I will know all!"

Kassem heard him sigh again, push, pull, knock. At the same time, his hair stood on end with horror as the dervish pronounced, in an unknown tongue, guttural formulas whose power was surely irresistible. Suddenly, there was a dreadful noise in the grotto; Kassem felt the stones heave, the earth shook under him, the rocks slid beneath his hands; light entered from all sides; a frightful landslip opened the vault. He looked. The dervish was no longer to be seen, and where the all-powerful magician had stood a moment before was an enormous pile of debris which all the strength of humankind would be unable to clear away. Then, at the entrance to the cave, now flooded with daylight, Kassem saw Amyneh—pale, panting, stretching out her arms to him. He ran to her, he embraced her, he looked into her eyes: it was really she. She had not had the courage to wait for him. She had walked after him, she had followed him. She had found him again, she kept him.



# *The Story of Gamber-Ali*



## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*



IRZA-HASAN was a painter in Shiraz. He bore the suffix of Khan, not in the least because he had a title of nobility, but only because his family had thought it suitable to confer the rank of Khan upon him from his birth. This is often done, as it is pleasant to be considered

a distinguished man; and if the king entirely forgets to confer an elegant title upon you, what is the harm in taking it? So Mirza-Hasan called himself Mirza-Hasan-Khan, as big as life, and when spoken to he was addressed thus: "How are you, Khan?"—which he heard without moving a muscle.

Unhappily, his fortune was not adequate to sustain his rank. He lived in a modest, not to say miserable, dwelling, in a street near the Bazaar of the Emir, still standing at that time, not having yet been shaken by the earthquakes. This dwelling, which one

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

entered by a low door cut in a wall, without windows or other openings, consisted of a square court eight metres long, with a basin of water in the centre, and a poor devil of a palm in a corner. The palm-tree resembled a feather-duster in distress and the water in the basin was stagnant. Two rooms, in ruins, were roofless and a third was half covered; the roof of the fourth still held. There the painter had established his *enderum*, the apartment of his wife, Bibi-Djanem (Madame My Heart), while he received his friends in the other room where, since only a fragment of the ceiling remained, he had the advantage of being half in the sun and half in the shade. Moreover, Mirza-Hasan-Khan lived on perfect terms with Bibi-Djanem, as long as she was not thwarted. But, if she had a neighbour to complain about, or if, at the bath where she spent six to eight hours on Wednesdays, she had been told anything dubious about the morals or manners of her husband, it must be admitted the blows rained on the ears of the guilty one. No lady in Shiraz, or even in the whole province of Fars, could wield that dangerous weapon, the slipper, as adroitly as Bibi-Djanem, a past mistress in that kind of fencing. She seized the terrible weapon by the toe and would let the metal heel fall here and there, with marvellous dexterity, upon the head, face, and hands of her unfortunate better half! Only to think of it gives one a chill; but soon it would be again a happy household; such



## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

catastrophes only happened about twice a week, and the rest of the time they smoked the *kalian* together, or drank much sweetened tea, in English china, or sang the songs of the Bazaar, accompanying themselves on the *kemantchah*.

Mirza-Hasan-Khan complained, with good cause, of the hard times which often obliged him to pawn most of his belongings and, sometimes, his wife's. But if he had not resorted to this bother, he would never have been able to regale himself with sweets, pastry, *raki* and the wine of Shiraz. So he was resigned. He borrowed from his friends, from the merchants and the Jews, and, as this was always a difficult undertaking, since the Khan enjoyed very poor credit, he had to hand over his clothes, rugs, chests, and anything he had. When good fortune smiled upon him and let fall a few coppers into the household, the two followed a very prudent financial system; with one-third of the money they amused themselves, with another they speculated, and with the third they redeemed some regretted object or even paid their taxes. This last occurred very seldom.

One need not go far for the causes of this sad state of affairs; disagreeable and worrisome people said it was the disorder and chronic improvidence of the couple. Pure calumny! The only reason was the guilty indifference of their contemporaries to people of birth and talent. Art was in a marasmus and this marasmus

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

was falling right on Mirza-Hasan-Khan and his wife Bibi-Djanem. The *kalemdans*, or painted inkwells, sold poorly; the caskets were in small demand; disloyal competitors, without the least merit, manufactured undersides of mirrors for which they ought to have blushed and had no shame in letting them go at a low price; finally, bookbindings were going out of style. When he stopped to think of this deplorable subject, the painter burst out in bitter words. He considered himself the last of the pure glory of the School of Shiraz, whose brightly coloured style he thought superior to the elegant ways of the Ispahani artists, and he never tired of proclaiming it. According to him, no one equalled him—how? Did not even approach him in the lifelike representation of birds; one could almost pick his roses and irises and eat his hazel-nuts, and when he represented figures he surpassed himself. Without any doubt, if that famous European, who long ago painted a picture of Hezret-e-Meriem (Her Highness, the Virgin Mary) holding on her knees the prophet Issa as an infant (may God bless and protect him!) could have seen the way he copied him, how he rendered the nose of Hezret-e-Meriem and the leg of the baby, and above all the back of the chair, the famous European, I say, would have thrown himself at Mirza-Hasan-Khan's feet and would have said to him: "What dog am I to kiss the dust of your shoes?"

This undoubtedly just opinion that Mirza-Hasan-

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

Khan had of his own worth was not his exclusively, a very flattering circumstance which he loved to remark. If those coarse people, the merchants, artisans and chance customers, paid poorly for his work and insulted him by haggling over the price, he was compensated by the commendation of intelligent and respectable men. His Royal Highness, the Prince Governor, honoured him from time to time with an order; the chief of the religion himself, the Imam-Djumé of Shiraz, that venerable pontiff, a saint, a majestic being, and august personage, and the Vizir of the Prince and even the chief of the Runners, would not consent to have an inkwell in their pockets that was not of his fabrication. Could anything give a better idea of the ability, even of the genius, of this painter beyond compare who had the good fortune to be called Mirza-Hasan-Khan? It was too bad; many of the illustrious patrons of art thought they did enough for the great man in accepting his works and always forgot to pay him, and he was foolish enough not to remind them of it. He contented himself with sighing about it and dodging, as best he could, the blows from the slipper that followed each disaster of this kind, for Bibi-Djanem attributed everything in the world that was troublesome and stupid to the ineptitude and instability of her dear spouse.

This couple had a son, already quite grown, who promised to become a very handsome boy. His mother

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

doted on him; she had named him Gamber-Ali. Mirza-Hasan-Khan had suggested endowing him with his hereditary title, but Bibi-Djanem was strongly against this, and, speaking in her habitual way to her husband, said:

“Booby! Leave me in peace, do not tire my ears with your stupidities! Are you not the son, the very own son of Djafer, the scullion, and is any one unaware of that? Besides, what good did it do you to ennoble yourself as you have done? They make fun of you and you earn no more money because of it. No! My son has no need of such absurdities! He has better ways of making his fortune. When I was pregnant with him, I made a pilgrimage on his account to the Imam-Zadah-Kassem, and this devotion never fails of its purpose. When he was born, I had provided myself in advance with an astrologer—I, do you hear, and not you, bad father! For you never think of anything practical! I carefully provided myself with an excellent astrologer! I gave him two *sahabgrans*. He promised me that Gamber-Ali, if God wills it, will become chief minister! He will become just that! I am sure of it, for I also sewed, and hung around his neck, a little bag containing blue seeds to give him happiness, and red seeds to give him courage. On his arms I put talismans, boxes containing verses from the Book of God, which will preserve him from all harm. Inshallah! Inshallah! Inshallah!”

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

“Inshallah!” answered Mirza-Hasan, in a deep, docile voice.

And that is how Gamber-Ali was started in life, with the care of a prudent mother. As he was provided with all the needed protection, it was safe to give him some freedom. Up to his seventh year, he could, if he liked, run around quite naked in the quarter with his young boy and girl companions. Early, he became the terror of the grocers and food merchants, whose dates, cucumbers and sometimes even skewers of roasted meat he knew how to spirit away wonderfully. When they caught him, they called him names which had absolutely no effect on him, and sometimes they beat him; not often, however, because they feared his mother. On these occasions, she was like a lioness, only more terrible. Hardly had little Gamber-Ali fled to her, rubbing with one hand the parts injured by the angry merchant, and with the other drying his eyes and nose, when, as soon as the matron heard the name of the offender through the sobs and cries, she lost no time; she put on her veil and burst out of her door like a water-spout, shaking her lifted arms and shrieking:

“Muslims! Our children are being butchered!”

At this call, five or six women who were accustomed to serve as her auxiliaries in these expeditions, roused by the warlike spirit, would run out of their houses and follow her, howling and gesticulating like her;

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

on the way they would gather recruits and arrive in full force before the guilty one's shop. The scoundrel would try to explain, but they would not listen to him and laid hands on everything. All the idlers made haste to mingle in the affair; the police would throw themselves into the brawl and try in vain to establish order with kicks and switchings. The best that could happen to the merchant would be not to be put in jail; as for a fine, he would always have to pay that in the end for having disturbed the public peace.

Gradually, Gamber-Ali reached the solemn day when his mother, interrupting his gambols, dressed him in a *shalwar* or trousers, a *kulijah* or coat, a belt, a cap, and sent him to school. Every one has to go through this; Gamber-Ali knew it and was resigned. At first he went to the school of the Molla-Saleh whose booth was between that of a butcher and a tailor. There were about fifteen pupils, boys and girls, crowded in with the master, like oranges in a basket, for the space was only a few feet wide. They learned to read and recite prayers, and, from morning to night, the neighbourhood was distracted by the sing-song of the student band. Gamber-Ali did not stay at Molla-Saleh's long, because this illustrious professor, who had been leader of a caravan of mules before consecrating himself to public instruction, had the habit of hitting his pupils hard, when, instead of confining their attention to his learned teaching, they indulged



## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

in tricks on the passers-by. Gamber-Ali complained to his mother, who came down upon the professor, threw the three cents she owed him for the last month at his head and declared he would never see her son again!

After leaving this school, the little man went to Molla-Jousef's place, where he studied for six months; then the school closed, as the master became a druggist, abandoning the white turban of knowledge for the hide bonnet of civil life. The third teacher of Gamber-Ali had been a musketeer of a former governor of whom tradition relates only one trait, that of having had his throat cut. When Molla-Jousef spoke of his patron, he used to say with conviction that the judge had not betrayed his trust. As for him, he was gentle, loved children, did not beat them, boasted of their progress and received, in addition to his regular salary, many small presents from the mothers, who were delighted with him. His house abounded in honey-cakes, pastry of uncooked flour, moulded in mutton fat, and sprinkled with sugar, and countless preserved fruits and *raki*.

At sixteen, Gamber-Ali had finished his education. He read, wrote and could do arithmetic; he knew by heart all the prescribed prayers and could even chant the *menadjats*, knew a little Arabic and could recite in a very pleasant voice some Persian lyrics and fragments of epic poetry and sincerely loved his parents.

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

He showed a mad desire to seek adventure and amuse himself, at any price but the risk of his skin, for he was very cowardly. This quality did not hinder him any more than most of his school-fellows, his contemporaries in age, from putting on the airs, demeanour and untidiness which characterize the elegant young man of the lowest classes in Persia, called *majos* in Andalusia. He wore very dirty, wide, blue cotton trousers and a coat of grey felt with flowing double sleeves; his open shirt left his chest bare; his hat was worn over his ear; his *gama*, or sword, was wide and pointed, with two edges, the handle, projecting from his belt, serving as a rest for his right hand, while with the left he held a flower which he sometimes placed in his mouth. This swagger suited him perfectly. He had curly, very black hair, his eyes, painted with kohl, were as beautiful as a woman's, his figure was like a cypress, and there was exceptional grace in all his movements.

Young, and in that array, he frequented the Armenian taverns; there he found very few strict Muslims, but many giddy fellows like himself and dangerous vagabonds called *loutis* or bravoos who thought as little of giving a knife-thrust, in anger, as of pouring out a glass of wine. In a word, he consorted with very bad company, which to many merrily inclined people is equivalent to perfectly amusing oneself.

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

Where did he procure the money indispensable for such a delightful existence? It would be a mistake to try to investigate. This way of securing an income might have led him where he was not desirous of going, if the destiny directed or foretold by the astrologer's skill had not indicated the line he was to follow. This event happened on one of the first days of the full moon of Shaban, at about four o'clock, after the evening prayers. He had gone to a little cabaret not far from the tomb where the poet Hafiz sleeps.

There was quite an assembly there: two evil-looking Kurds, a molla, of the kind who sell marriage-contracts for two days, twenty-four hours or less, a morality not approved by the scholastic party of the clergy; four muleteers, strong jolly fellows, not intimidated by the Kurds; two young boys like Gamber-Ali; an enormous *topdji*, artilleryman, from Khorassan, endlessly tall but with a proportionate width to establish the balance; then a *pishkedmet* or personal valet of the Prince Governor, there for smuggling. The Armenian, the host of the house, stretched an ox-hide on the rug and brought out in turn roasted almonds which excited the thirst, white cheese, bread and skewers of *kebab*, fillet of roast mutton between bits of grease and laurel leaves, the *ne plus ultra* of delicacy. In the midst of these trifles were solemnly placed a dozen *baggalis* or flat glass flasks, which timorous drinkers can easily hide under their arms and carry to their homes unde-

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

tected by any one, and containing nothing less than wine or brandy. They drank quite quietly for two hours. The talk was agreeable, as was to be expected from such distinguished people. Candles were brought and set on the cloth with a new row of bottles, when the molla, interrupting one of the two Kurds, who, with bared head, was singing a sad song through his nose, made the following proposition:

“Excellencies, since the mirrors of my eyes have the signal happiness to-day to reflect so many prepossessing faces, I thought of presenting an offer which will, no doubt, be received with indulgence by one of the illustrious members of this company.”

“The excess of Your Excellency’s kindness transports me,” answered one of the muleteers, who was still cool-blooded, but was swaying his head in a way to make him dizzy. “Whatever you may command is precisely what we shall do.”

“May your indulgence not diminish!” retorted the molla. “I know a young woman who desires marriage with a man of some account and I have promised her to find a husband worthy of her. To speak to you confidentially, as one can amongst friends, and not to hide any of the truth from you, the lady in question is of a beauty to dim the sun and make the very moon despair. The brightest stars are lustreless pebbles in comparison with her diamond-like eyes. Her figure is

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

like a willow branch, and when she steps on the ground the earth thanks her and faints with love!"

This description, which gave a fairly flattering account of the molla's lady friend, had little effect, so little that one of the *loutis* began to sing in a trembling voice that resembled a gargle:

"The prime minister is an ass and the king is not any better!"

This was the beginning of a song recently brought from Teheran. The molla did not allow himself to be turned aside and continued in a whining voice which struggled to make headway against the nasal trembling of his comrade:

"Excellencies! This last word in perfection possesses, behind the bazaar of the coppersmiths, a house with three rooms, eight almost new rugs, and five chests full of clothes. She has, in addition, *kabbalehs* or deeds for a goodly sum; I do not know how much, but it cannot be less than eighty *tomans*."

The second chapter of the bride's qualities roused every one and one of the *loutis* cried:

"Behold me! She wants a husband, let her take me! Where can she find as good a one? You know me, molla? If I do not get her I will die of love and regret!"

At that, he began to weep, and to show the intensity of his feelings he drew his *gama* and was about

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

to strike himself on the head; but the gunner held him back, and as every one was now attentive, and perceived that the molla had not said all, they implored him to continue his panegyric, to find out if there were not some blemish to the delicious picture he had drawn.

“A blemish, excellencies! May your goodness not diminish! May all the blessings rain upon your heads! What blemish can there be? An incomparable beauty, is that a spot? A fortune such as I have just computed, is that a failing? An immaculate virtue, comparable only to that of the Prophet’s wives, could that be a cause for blame? As for this virtue, magnanimous lords, it is not one of those things one can affirm without being able to prove it! It is incontestable, established by unanswerable proofs, and these proofs, here they are! They are the letters of the *tobeh*, dated this morning.”

At these words, the enthusiasm exceeded all bounds. The *louti*, who had been prevented from hitting himself on the head, took advantage of this moment when each was absorbed in his own thoughts, raised his eyes and hands to heaven, and, murmuring, “Beh! Beh! Beh!” slashed himself on the head and began to bleed. Meanwhile, the molla had unfolded the precious document and shown it to the public, and began to read in an impressive voice. But before joining these intensely interested listeners, the reader must know what the letters of *tobeh* are.



## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

When a lady has too frequently given cause for scandal, public opinion unfortunately turns against her and vexations result. Then the judge considers the giddiness of her conduct; he repeatedly asks her for presents; he keeps track of her goings and comings, and after some mishaps the lady almost always finds it necessary to change her mode of life. She cannot accomplish this except by marrying. But how marry in a position as difficult as hers? In a very simple way. She goes and finds a religious person, tells him her case, portrays her distress, and the religious person draws his inkstand from his pocket. He gives her a bit of paper attesting that regret for the past is consuming the penitent, and as God is merciful, especially when one has the strong resolve not to fall back into one's errors, the erstwhile sinner is whitewashed from head to feet. No one has any right to suspect the steadfastness of her principles and she is as marriageable as any other young girl, provided she can find a husband. There is no more admirable spectacle than this sudden transformation, and it is not expensive, for it is acquired at a specified sum.

So the molla read the document in a clear, incisive voice, as follows:

"The said woman, Bulbul (Nightingale), having had the misfortune to lead a thoughtless life for several years, tells us she deplores it deeply and regrets having vexed the souls of virtuous people. We attest

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

her repentance, which is known to us, and we declare her fault effaced.”

Under the writing, there was the date, which was not of that morning, and the seal of one of the principal ecclesiastics of the city.

The reading was not concluded before the more intoxicated of the two Kurds declared himself ready to kill any one so imprudent as to dispute with the molla the hand of his protégée. But the gunner was not intimidated and struck the aggressor in the face. At that, one of Gamber-Ali's comrades threw the flasks at the head of one of the muleteers, while the other, almost at the same time, threw the molla down upon him and the fight became general.

The *pishkedmet* of the Prince, an official person, had standards to maintain; he instinctively knew his dignity was involved; and, if it was unpleasant to receive blows, it might be compromising as well to carry traces of them on the nose or other parts of the face, for how could he hope that such coarse people would take the most important considerations into account? The dignified servant rose as best he could, trying to steady himself, and protecting his head with his hands he made ready to go; but his pantomime was misinterpreted.

Some of the combatants thought he intended to fetch the guard. So they united against him, but every one was not on their side, and Gamber-Ali found himself

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

a mattress between the poor *pishkedmet* and his assailants, amongst whom were the two muleteers, drunker and angrier than the others. The unfortunate son of the painter was in a frenzy of fear; he shrieked and called his mother to help him. Surely, the valiant Bibi-Djanem would not have been called upon in vain by the beloved child of her womb; but alas! she was far away and could not hear. However, Gamber-Ali put his arms around the *pishkedmet* and held him tightly and received the blows intended for the poor man whom he was entreating to save him by all he held most sacred in the world; he acted as an unconscious shield, roughly struck, for the man whom he was imploring. It is probable that the fight would have ended most injuriously for the palace dignitary and the youth, if the Armenian tavern-keeper, a big, strong fellow, long accustomed to similar scenes, and not astonished or stirred by them, had not suddenly appeared in the room. Without stopping to find out who was right or wrong, he seized the *pishkedmet* by the collar with one hand, and with the other the back of Gamber-Ali's clothes, and with a vigorous thrust threw the two unfortunates across the open door which closed behind them. They both rolled over in the sand and lay quite a while, stunned by the shock, and found it difficult to rise. However, they both thought of the same thing without speaking, and equally in anguish, that the garrison might attack them; they were all for

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

getting away and rose to their feet with a tremendous effort. The *pishkedmet* said to Gamber-Ali:

“Son of my soul, keep on defending me! Do not leave me! The holy Imams will bless you!”

Gamber-Ali did not care for solitude. He approached his protégé, and holding each other by the hand, a little shaky, as fast as they could they left the alley where the cabaret was. Then, when they were on the street, they found both courage and voice.

“Gamber-Ali,” said the palace servant, “lions are not as dauntless as you. You have saved my life, and, by God, I will never forget it! You will not have helped an ingrate. I will make your fortune. Come and find me to-morrow at the palace, and if I am not at the gate ask for me; I will surely have something to tell you. But, above all, swear to me that you will tell no one what happened to us to-night and that you will not whisper a word of it to your father, mother or to your pillow! I am a pious man, honoured by all for the strictness of my morals, which I never depart from. You can understand, light of my eyes, that if they should slander me I would be very unhappy!”

Gamber-Ali bound himself by the most horrible oaths not to confide the secret of his new friend even to an ant, the most silent and close-mouthed creature alive. He swore on the head of his friend, on his mother’s, his father’s, his paternal and maternal grand-

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

'father's, and consented to be called a son of a dog and damned if he ever opened his mouth about their adventure. Then, after having multiplied his formidable oaths for a full quarter of an hour, he left the *pishkedmet*, somewhat sobered, who kissed him on his eyes and promised to be faithful to the meeting arranged for the next day.

Gamber-Ali had been hurt by the blows and had been afraid of being beaten to death. The danger over, and the pain from the bruises a little allayed, he felt very free; this was not his first affair and unlike the *pishkedmet* he had no reason to worry about his reputation. He could unreservedly let his imagination become inflamed over the promises he had received, and with his head full of dazzling fireworks, saturated with the splendours to come, he arrived at the paternal home in the best possible humour.

All the wandering dogs of the quarter knew him and made no hostile demonstration against his legs. The night-watchmen, stretched out under the projecting roofs of the shops, raised their heads as he approached and let him pass without questioning him. So he slipped into his house.

There, although it was late, he found his worthy parents seated before a flask of *raki* and a partially consumed roast of lamb. Bibi-Djanem was playing the mandolin, and Mirza-Hasan, having removed his coat and hat, was enthusiastically beating the tambourine.

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

His head had been shaved eight days previously and half of his beard was painted black with an inch of white at the roots. The couple, their eyes white with ecstasy, sang loudly:

“My Cypress, my Tulip, let us be drunk with divine love!”

Gamber-Ali stopped respectfully at the threshold and greeted the authors of his being. He flaunted his right hand on the handle of his *gama*; his bonnet was staved in, his shirt torn, his curls untidy. He looked, according to the secret opinion of Bibi-Djanem, who was an authority, like the most delicious braggadocio that feminine taste could dream of.

“Sit down, my darling,” said the lady, laying down her guitar, while Mirza-Hasan-Khan finished an audacious trill and a clever run. “Where do you come from? Have you had a good time this evening?”

Gamber-Ali crouched down, as his mother had just given him leave to do so, but modestly against the casing of the door, and answered:

“I just saved the life of the lieutenant of the Prince Governor. He was attacked in the country by twenty warriors, tigers in daring and fierceness, all of them Mamacenis or Bakhtiaris, I am sure! For such gigantic men could only come from those two tribes! I attacked them and put them to flight with the help of God!”

Gamber-Ali then took a modest pose.

“Just see the son I gave birth to, I alone!” cried



## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

Bibi-Djanem, triumphantly looking her husband up and down. "Kiss me, my soul! Kiss your mother, my life!"

The young hero did not have to incommode himself much to satisfy the tenderness of his admirer; the room was small, he leaned slightly forward and put his forehead against the lips that were offered him. As for Mirza-Hasan-Khan, he was contented to say shrewdly:

"That is good business!"

"What did His Lordship, the lieutenant, give you?" continued Bibi-Djanem.

"He invited me to breakfast to-morrow at the palace and will present me to His Highness."

"You will be appointed a general!" said his mother with conviction.

"Or a State councillor!" said his father.

"I would not dislike being chief of the customs to begin with," murmured Gamber-Ali in a thoughtful voice.

He believed more than half of what he had just invented, and this was because of the peculiar laws that govern the perspective of oriental minds. A *pish-kedmet* of the Prince, who wished the poor and interesting Gamber-Ali well, was necessarily a man of rare merit, and, if so, why should he not be his master's favourite? Since he was his master's favourite, he was his actual deputy, and every affair was necessarily confided to him, and with such power how could one

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

imagine he could be niggardly in heaping rewards upon the head of his saviour? In truth, Gamber-Ali had not routed a band of fierce and terrible marauders, but why should he say he was leaving the tavern? To whom would such an indiscretion do any good? Was it not better to put an honourable glaze over his whole story since it would end in a most extraordinary fashion for him? Besides, it was evident, and the *pishked-met* did not conceal it from him, that he had been courageous beyond all powers of eulogy.

The dreams the mother and son elaborated during that happy night cannot be recorded. Bibi-Djanem already saw her idol in the brocaded robe of the prime minister, and the fancy of having a beating administered to the meat-roaster's wife, who had spoken ill of her that evening, faded away. However, they had to sleep a little. Towards morning, the three of them lay down on the rug and for three hours enjoyed, as they say, a gentle sleep, but at dawn Gamber-Ali jumped to his feet. He washed, and hurriedly and summarily recited his prayers, and walked out into the street, swinging his hips, as was proper to a man of his quality.

Arrived at the palace, he saw, as always, seated or standing before the main entrance, a number of soldiers, all grades of servants, petitioners, dervishes and, finally, people who had come either to attend to their affairs or through special connections with the inhabit-

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

ants of the house. He opened a way for himself through the crowd, displaying the insolence peculiar to handsome youths and tolerated in them, and asked the porter, in an arrogant voice softened by an attractive smile, whether his friend, Assad-Oullah-Bey, was at home?

"Here he is," answered the porter.

"May the kindness of Your Excellency not diminish," said Gamber-Ali, rushing toward his protector, who received his greeting in a most friendly fashion.

"Your fortune is made," said Assad-Oullah (the Lion of God).

"As a consequence of your mercy!"

"You deserve everything good. This is the point. I have spoken to the *ferrash-bashi*, chief layer of carpets to His Highness. He is my friend, a most virtuous and honourable man. It would be doing him a wrong even to extol his integrity; all the world knows it, as well as the justice, truth, and brilliant impartiality of his conduct. He consents to admit you as one of his subordinates, and from this day forward you are one of them. Naturally, you will have to give him a small present, but he cares so little for the goods of this world that it will only be to show your respect. You will give him five gold *tomans* and four sugar-loaves."

"May the blessings of the Prophet be upon him!" answered Gamber-Ali, a little disconcerted. "May I

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

ask you what my earnings will be in the illustrious offices I am to fill?"

"Your earnings," said the Lion of God softly, in a confidential tone, and looking around him to make sure no one was listening, "your earnings are eight *sahabgrans* a month, but His Highness' steward generally pays only six. You leave him two for his trouble; four remain to you. You do not want to be ungrateful to your worthy chief and will not refuse to offer him at least half. I know you are incapable of this; it would be most unseemly conduct. We may say then that two *sahabgrans* will remain for you. What can you do with them if not regale the *naib ferrash*, the chief of your squad, to make a sure, devoted friend of him; for do not be mistaken, under a rugged exterior he has a heart of gold!"

"May the heavens fill him with blessings," answered Gamber-Ali, now very sad; "but what will remain for me?"

"I will tell you, my child," said the Lion of God, with a serious and formal air which suited his long experience and immense beard very well. "Every time you carry a present to some one, from the prince or from one of your superiors, you will naturally receive a recompense from the person so honoured, all the more so as you are very attractive, my child! No doubt, you will have to share what you have accepted with your comrades, but you do not have to tell them exactly

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

how much was put in your pockets; on that score, there are small cautions that you will learn very quickly. Then, when charged with administering the bastinado, it is customary for the patient to offer a small sum to the executors so that they will strike gently or even entirely to the side. You will have to learn how to do this. This simple kind of dexterity comes quickly, especially to a bright boy like you. I do not doubt your chiefs will promptly esteem you and will give you a commission to collect taxes in the villages. It will be necessary for you to adjust your interests with those of the peasants who never want to pay, with that of the State which always wants to receive, and with that of the Prince who would be angry if he had empty hands. Believe me, it is a gold mine! Finally, a thousand occasions, a thousand circumstances, a thousand encounters will present themselves when, as I do not doubt for a single instant, you will accomplish wonders; and as for me, I shall be really happy to have been able to contribute to putting you in a good position in this world."

Gamber-Ali seized the alluring side of the picture so affably and minutely presented to him and was charmed by so many glittering perfections. One point only worried him.

"Excellency," he said, in a quivering voice, "may all bliss recompense you for the good you have done to a helpless orphan! Possessing as I do nothing in the

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

world but my respect for you, how can I give five *tomans* and four sugar-loaves to the venerable Fer-rash-Bashi?"

"Very simply," answered the Lion of God. "He is so good, he will wait. You will make a small offering on your first profits."

"In that case, I accept your proposition with pleasure," cried Gamber-Ali, at the height of joy.

"I will present you at once and you will start on your duties to-day."

The *pishkedmet* turned on his heels and led the young acolyte through the crowd and into the court. It was a big, empty space, surrounded by low buildings of sun-dried bricks, grey in color, relieved at the corner by cordons of brick, baked in the furnace, whose red tones gave a brilliant effect. Here and there mosaics of blue tiles, ornamented with flowers and arabesques, embellished the whole. Unfortunately, a part of the arcades had crumbled, others were jagged, but ruins are an essential part of all Asiatic buildings. In the centre of the courtyard, a dozen cannons, with or without gun-carriages, stood about, and the artillerymen were seated or lying down around them. The *djelodars*, or grooms, held the horses, whose satiny backs were partly covered with crimson saddle-cloths with multicolored embroidery; here a group of *fer-rashes* walked, switch in hand, to maintain an order which did not exist; farther on, soldiers were cooking



## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

their dinners in pots; officers crossed the court insolently, gently or politely, according to their regard for those whom they passed. This one they saluted; this other bowed respectfully to them as the more influential person. Such is the way of the world in all the kingdoms of the earth, though completely artless here.

From the great court, Assad-Oullah, followed by his recruit, penetrated into another enclosure, less vast, in the centre of which was a square pool of water; the ripples were charmingly coloured by the azure reflections of the facing, which was made of large, beautiful blue-enamelled tiles. On the edge of the pool were huge plane-trees, whose trunks were hidden by the leafy and abundant twining of gigantic rose-bushes covered with fresh blossoms. Opposite the low and narrow entrance, through which the two friends had come, was a very high room which a European would have taken for a stage-setting, for it was open in front and supported by two slender painted and gilded columns. The back looked like a curtain, and here and on the wings was the most attractive, charming mixture of paintings, gildings and mirrors. Rich rugs covered the floor, raised about six feet above the level of the court, and there, resting on cushions, His Highness, the Prince-Governor in person, surrounded by handsome lords and his principal servants, deigned to breakfast off an enormous platter of *pilav* and a dozen viands in porcelain dishes.

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

Two of the three sides of the court, not occupied by the room, were in ruins; the third presented a row of fairly habitable rooms.

Gamber-Ali felt a certain shyness at finding himself in such an august place, and at the same time felt as big as the world, for being so fortunate as to have been admitted. He thought that henceforth he had no equals on this earth, since he belonged to a paragon of authority who, if he liked, could have him cut up into tiny pieces. Before he had entered the royal residence, he was perfectly free, and the Prince-Governor, who ignored his existence, could never have sent for him. Henceforth, as a *noouker*, or servant, he was a member of the happy class which includes the lowest scullion and the prime minister, and he could have the joy of hearing the Prince call out before a quarter of an hour, "Let them beat Gamber-Ali!" which would obviously indicate that Gamber-Ali was not a nobody like his unfortunate father, since the Prince would condescend to concern himself about him.

While he was giving himself up to these presumptuous reflections, Assad-Oullah said to him, pushing him with his elbow:

"Here is the *ferrash-bashi*! Have no fear, my child!"

The recommendation was not groundless. The chief layer of carpets of the Prince of Shiraz looked quite gruff; half of his nose was eaten away by an illness;

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

his black moustache was pointed and extended half a foot to right and left of his ruined nose; his dark eyes shone under thick brows and his walk was imposing. He was wrapped in a magnificent dress of Kerman wool, wore a *djubbeh*, or coat of Russian cloth, richly adorned with gold lace, and the sheepskin of his bonnet was so fine that at a mere glance one could estimate the price as at least eight *tomans*, which, according to oriental calculations, is not far from twenty dollars.

This majestic dignitary advanced composedly towards the *pishkedmet* who greeted him, placing his hand on his heart; but Gamber-Ali did not permit himself a like familiarity; he slid his hands along his legs, from his thighs to his knees, bending over as far as he could without touching his nose to the ground. Then he straightened up, stuck his fingers into his belt, and humbly waited, with eyes lowered, until they would do him the honour of speaking to him.

The *ferrash-bashi* stroked his beard approvingly, and with a gracious glance made Assad-Oullah aware of his satisfaction. The latter hastened to say:

“The young man has merit, he is full of honesty and discretion; I can swear it on Your Excellency’s head. I know he goes with proper people and avoids bad company! Your Excellency will certainly be exceedingly kind to him. He will do everything in the world to satisfy you, we are clearly agreed on that.”

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

"That is all very fine," answered the Ferrash-Bashi. "But before concluding I have a question to ask the young man in private."

He took Gamber-Ali aside and said:

"His Lordship Assad-Oullah treats us like a father, but, admit, how much have you offered him?"

"May your kindness not diminish," said Gamber-Ali ingenuously, "I would not permit myself to offer a present to any one, since my wretched fortune obliges me to wait, counting the days, until I can present my respects to Your Highness."

"But at least you promised him something?" responded the *ferrash-bashi*, smiling. "How much did you promise him?"

"On your head, on your children's," cried Gamber-Ali, "I did not proceed at all, waiting to take your orders in this matter."

"You did well. Always act discreetly and people will think well of you. This is my disinterested advice. Do not trouble yourself about me. I am only too happy to help you. But, as you are setting out in life, you must learn to reward each one according to his rank; without this, the very stars could not function in heaven, and the whole universe would become a prey to disorder. You know a *pishkedmet* is not a *ferrash-bashi*; because of this you cannot legitimately give the former anything but the exact half of what you intend for the latter, and, finally, to state the

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

thing precisely, give Assad-Oullah-Bey, as soon as you can, five *tomans* and four sugar-loaves, not more. You see, I intend to manage your little interests."

Whereupon, the *ferrash-bashi* gave Gamber-Ali's cheek a friendly pat and, having notified him that henceforth he was one of the Prince's men, he withdrew whither his duty called him. The new servant of the great could not help worrying a little about his position. The Lion of God had only indicated a third of his expenses; instead of five *tomans* and four sugar-loaves, he was pledged for fifteen *tomans* and twelve sugar-loaves. This was not the same thing. But he diverted his thoughts from his miseries, thanked his protector effusively, kissed the hem of his garment and wandered about in the palace courtyards, as he now was entitled to do. He accosted his fellow-servants, some of whom he knew, having met them amongst the choice company he usually frequented, and engaged others in conversation. He was liked at once and was shown unbelievable friendliness. He enjoyed the Prince's tea and could even slip some pieces of sugar, unnoticed, into his pockets. All kinds of inoffensive games were played and, as Gamber-Ali was not a novice, he drew a dozen *sahabgrans* from this skilfully conducted operation and the esteem of all. In short, he appeared to every one what he really was, a very handsome youth, physically and morally.

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

When he returned home in the evening, his mother eagerly questioned him.

"I am exhausted with fatigue," he replied nonchalantly. "The Prince insisted upon my dining with him. We played cards all day, but, thanks to my discretion, I only wished to win a little cash from him. Here it is. Another time, when I am solidly anchored in his good graces, I will not treat him so well. In order not to give umbrage to the jealous, we have agreed that I shall be one of his *ferrashes* for a time and become Vizir later on. While waiting, I shall have nothing to do but amuse myself all day. We are to leave for Teheran soon and His Highness intends to recommend me to the King."

Bibi-Djanem tightly embraced her adorable son. Finding him a little feverish, she promised him a large bowl of tea, made of willow-leaves, a marvellous preventive against fever, for the next morning. As Mirza-Hasan-Khan had brought home ten *sahabgrans* from the sale of two inkwells, she prepared the thinnest pastry and a dish of *kuftehs*, meat-balls fried in grape-leaves, whose perfection had always been her undisputed glory. They ate and drank and half the night passed in perfect joy.

In the morning, Gamber-Ali, having partaken of his elixir and received the maternal recommendation not to allow himself to be cheated by any one, went to take up his duties at the palace.



## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

The truth is an admirable thing! She slips through everywhere, even into lies, without men knowing how. The near departure of the Prince-Governor for the capital, announced by the young *ferrash*, whose sole authority for this was furnished by the ardour of his imagination, turned out to be true. Gamber-Ali was very much surprised when his fellow-servants announced that they were to leave in eight days, since the Prince had been recalled, and even replaced; a new proof of the well-known wisdom of the government.

In these countries, they do not amuse themselves with any minute settling of accounts with the representatives of the government. The office-holders are appointed; they gather the yield of taxes; they keep the greater part for themselves, under the pretext that the harvest was poor or business bad, or that public works absorbed the money. They are not searched for chicanery and what they say is accepted. Then, at the end of four or five years, they are dismissed; they are sent for; they are asked which they prefer, to give an accounting or to pay a specified sum of money. They always choose the second alternative because it would be difficult for them to present an orderly accounting. In this way, half or two-thirds of what they have amassed is taken from them. From what is left they give presents to the King, ministers, ladies of the harem and influential people, and at a good price another

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

government is entrusted to them which they will administer without changing their system and arrive at the same end. This is a method whose merits need no emphasis; its advantages stand out clearly. The people are delighted to see their governors disgorge; the governors spend their lives enriching themselves and finally die poor, never doubting that this was the inevitable end. As for the supreme power, he spares himself the bother of surveillance, an annoyance to his agents and in poor taste.

His Highness, the Prince, having exploited for a sufficient length of time the province of which Shiraz is the capital, was asked to come and tell about his affairs to the pillars of the Empire, that is, the chiefs of the State. This was all according to custom; but, as is usually the case, and as nothing in the world is perfect, it was a hard moment for him who was out of favour. He did not know exactly to what extent he would have to pay.

Early in the morning, and even before dawn, his steward fled, carrying off some small souvenirs of value. The *ferrash-bashi* was gloomy. He doubted whether his position would continue to be as lucrative as in the past. The *pishkedmets* exchanged thoughts in low voices; the grooms of the stable, the *ferrashes*, the soldiers and the *kahvedjis*, having nothing to lose, were delighted to change places. From time to time another object disappeared, to be found a

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

month later in the bazaar. As for the people of Shiraz, when they heard the news, they gave themselves up to an almost delirious joy. Everywhere they extolled to the skies the justice, generosity and goodness of the King; they compared him to Noushirwan, a former monarch, to whom virtues are attributed that, in his day, were undoubtedly attributed to another. Throughout the bazaars of the city there was an outburst of songs, each more spiteful and audaciously slanderous than the last. Nothing equals the ingratitude of the populace.

The *ferrash-bashi* took Gamber-Ali aside.

"My child," he said, "you see I am very busy. I have to put the tents in order for the journey, see to it that the mules are shod and, finally, that nothing is lacking. So I have no time to look after my own interests. See, here is a note for eight *tomans* underwritten for me by one of the writers of the arsenal, Mirza-Gaffar, who lives on the Green Square, on the left, next to the pond. Go and find my debtor and tell him I cannot wait any longer, for I do not know when I shall return and I am leaving next week. Settle this little affair to my satisfaction and you will not have cause to regret it."

At this, he winked his eye most significantly. Gamber-Ali, delighted, promised to succeed and quickly set out whither his superior had sent him. He had no trouble in finding the house of Mirza-Gaffar, and

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

approaching, he knocked roughly at the door. He had put his cap on awry and had armed himself with his most resolute air.

After a moment, the door was opened; he was in the presence of a little old man who wore an immense pair of spectacles on his hooked nose.

"Greetings to you!" said Gamber-Ali, brusquely.

"And greetings to you, my amiable child!" answered the old man in a honeyed voice.

"Am I speaking to the noble Mirza-Gaffar?"

"To your slave."

"I come on the *ferrash-bashi's* account. I have a note for eight *tomans* that Your Excellency must pay within the hour."

"Assuredly, but will you not permit me to be charmed with the sight of your beauty? The angels in heaven cannot be compared with you. Honour my house by accepting a cup of tea. It is warm, and you have taken too much trouble in transporting Your Lordship here."

"May your kindness never diminish," answered Gamber-Ali, becoming haughtier as he observed the old man's extreme politeness.

However, he consented to enter and sat down in the room.

In the turn of a hand, Mirza-Gaffar brought a brazier, made a fire, put a copper kettle on the coals, put in sugar, reached for the box of tea, lighted the



### THE STORY OF GAMBER ALI

In the turn of a hand, Mirza-Gaffar brought a brazier, made a fire, put a copper kettle on the coals, put in sugar, reached for the box of tea, lighted the *kalian*, and offered it to his guest.





## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

*kalian* and offered it to his guest. Then, after asking about his illustrious health and having thanked Heaven that all was well in that respect, he began the conversation:

“You are a young man so perfectly accomplished and ornamented by the gifts of Heaven that I do not hesitate to tell you the whole truth, and may curses and damnation fall upon me if I deviate either to the right or left from the line of the most perfect sincerity. I would pay you at once, only that I do not know how, as I have not a cent.”

“May your goodness not diminish!” answered Gamber-Ali coldly, passing him the *kalian*. “But I am not authorized by my venerable chief to listen to such talk and I need the money. If you do not give it to me, you know what will happen. I will burn your grandfather and even the grandfather of your grandfather!”

This threat seemed to have a strong effect on the old writer, who had probably not expected such havoc amongst his ancestors. So he cried in a pitiable voice:

“There is no more Islam! There is no more religion! Where shall I find a protector, since this houri’s face, this full moon of all accomplishments, looks at me unkindly! If I humbly offer you two *sahabgrans*, will you speak in my favour?”

“Your goodness is excessive!” retorted Gamber-Ali.

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

“Where is the *ferrash* who has disgraced himself by accepting such a sum as that?”

“I would place at your feet all the treasures of the earth and sea if I possessed them, and keep nothing for myself, but I do not possess them. On your head, on your eyes, and for pity of a miserable old man, accept these five *sahabgrans* that I offer you whole-heartedly and kindly tell his exalted Excellency, the *Ferrash-Bashi*, that you yourself saw my profound misery.”

“I submit a humble request,” interrupted the *ferrash*. “I ask no better than to help you to benefit through your prayers, but Your Excellency must be reasonable. I will accept, to please you, the gift of a *toman* with which you honour me; it is useless, but I would be unspeakably ashamed if I disobliged you. So a *toman*, say no more. You will give me two *tomans* for my chief and I will arrange the affair. Only our man is quick and impetuous, and it is advisable that for the next eight days Your Excellency does not appear in this noble house. Unpleasantnesses might result from it.”

They argued for an hour, they took several cups of tea, they embraced each other heartily, then, as *Gamber-Ali* was unshaken, the writer of the arsenal yielded and gave a *toman* for himself and two for his master, and they parted with mutual assurances of perfect affection.

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

"Greetings to you!" said Gamber-Ali to the chief of the *ferrashes*.

"That is good! How much did you get?"

"Excellency, I met the wretch on the road, he was fleeing; I took him by the collar and reproached him with his crime and, in spite of the passers-by, who wanted to intervene, I emptied his pockets. I bring you the *toman* I found in them. There was nothing more!"

"You lie!"

"On your head, on my head, on my eyes, on my mother's, on my father's, on my grandfather's! On the Book of God, on the Prophet and all his predecessors (may salvation and blessings be upon them!), I tell you the absolute truth!"

The *ferrash-bashi* went off like a streak, boiling with indignation. He ran to the writer's house, knocked, and there was no answer. He inquired from a rope-maker, who lived near by. The rope-maker told him that Mirza-Gaffar had been away for two days and upheld his say-so by a volley of oaths. The *ferrash-bashi* had been indisputably tricked. He returned very sadly to the palace; evidently Gamber-Ali had not been wrong.

"My son," said his superior, "you did your best, but Fate was against us!"

After this, Gamber-Ali increased in favour and was looked upon as the pearl of the Prince's household.

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

He was charged with all the commissions; he looked out for his own pockets and, although on the whole he did not succeed entirely to the liking of those who employed him, his manner was so frank and his face so sincere that he could not be blamed for the adverse outcome. Meanwhile, the preparations for the journey were completed and the Prince gave the order for the departure.

At the head of the convoy came the horsemen, armed with long lances; then the soldiers; then followed stablemen, leading the horses, the luggage, the equeries of the Prince, the principal officers of his house and, finally, the Prince himself, on a magnificent horse, and all the city authorities with their suites, who were to accompany him for a league and a half from Shiraz, then more baggage, other soldiers, other *ferrashes* and a crowd of muleteers. The harem travelled on a parallel road, the ladies shut in *takht-e-rewans*, or litters, with one mule hitched in front and one behind, admirable inventions, let it be said parenthetically, to produce the best possible idea of the most severe seasickness; the women-servants were in *kedjavehs*, a kind of basket placed right and left on some kind of mount. From afar could be heard the conversation, cries and sighs of these illustrious ladies and the insults they heaped upon the poor muleteers. This triumphant departure had its drab side too. The fair sex of the city had hastily gathered in crowds, the dervishes accompanying them; as well

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

as Gamber-Ali's former friends, whose torn clothes, *gamas*, long moustaches and naughty boys' behaviour promised nothing edifying. As soon as the convoy appeared, there was a chorus of shouts, and they howled with all the more perfection as Bibi-Djanem was in the front row with a troop of her friends, long accustomed to all kinds of aggressions and terrible to the bravest. The noblest titles came easily to these veterans: dog, son of a dog, grandson of a dog, bandit, thief, assassin, pillager, and many other epithets not translatable. The latter especially came flaming from the mouths of the female warriors. In the midst of these ejaculations a reserve of urchins, in safety behind their mothers, loudly sang such fragments as this:

The Prince of Shiraz,  
The Prince of Shiraz,  
He is a fool,  
He is a fool;  
But his mother is a hussy  
And his sister too!

For a while, His Highness was no doubt so deeply interested in the conversation of the lords surrounding him that he did not seem to see what was going on, or to hear what was being said or rather shouted in his ears. In the end, however, he lost patience and made a sign to the *ferrash-bashi*, who ordered his men to disperse the mob by hitting them with long poles. They all went at it vigorously, and Gamber-Ali, hitting like

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

the others, heard a well-known voice vociferating in his ears:

“Spare your mother, my precious! And have us come to Teheran as quickly as possible, your father and I, to share your grandeur!”

“If God is willing, it will be soon!” Gamber-Ali cried enthusiastically. At that, he fell with bent arms upon another old rioter and, seizing a dervish by his beard, shook him vigorously. This valiant act thrust the crowd back. The *ferrashes*, more than ever, thought their comrade a lion, and seeing the riot calm down they joined the rear guard, laughing heartily.

The journey was accomplished without accident. After two months of marching, they reached Teheran, the residence of sovereignty, in official parlance, and the negotiations began between the Prince and the pillars of the State. There were many ruses on both sides, they threatened, made countless promises and sought middle terms. Sometimes they went ahead and again they drew back. The grand *vizir* was inclined to severity; the King's mother was for indulgence, having received a beautiful turquoise, finely set, and surrounded by brilliants of the proper value. The King's sister was ill-disposed; but the chief of the valets was a devoted friend; it is true, he was confuted by the private treasurer of the palace. As for the bearer of the every-day pipe, no one could doubt his wish to have everything finish for the best. Gamber-Ali did



## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

not concern himself much with these important matters. His affairs were beginning to turn for the worse and he often worried about his lot. It was his own fault.

Seeing himself favoured, he had resolved, for his part, not to give anything to the *ferrash-bashi* or to the *pishkedmet*, Assad-Oullah. Although it was generally known that he had many occasions to make profits, he had always claimed, in spite of the evidence, that his penury was extreme, which did not prevent him from spending part of the day gambling and ostentatiously showing his gold. Finally, his two protectors had opened their eyes. They were serious men; they did not say a word. However, Gamber-Ali quickly perceived that he was no longer being treated with the same distinction, especially with the same affability. Lucrative commissions were not handed over to him; they went to others; the hard or confining work, fastening the pegs, mending the tents, shaking the rugs, now took up most of his day. If, as formerly, he went to roam around the kitchens, the chief of the service, a great friend of Assad-Oullah's, sent him back to his quarter with cross words. In short, all was changed and the poor child felt that the adversaries he had made through the subtlety of his mind and his shrewd tricks were only waiting for an occasion to let the weight of their resentment fall upon him.

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

One morning, as the *ferrashes* were amusing themselves in front of the door, and Gamber-Ali, always nimble and active, always in good humour in spite of his worries, was wrestling with two or three of his fellow-servants, in turn chasing and being chased by them, he was driven against a butcher's stall. One of the players, called Kerim, a delicate boy and a consumptive, took hold of a knife lying on the stall and laughingly threatened Gamber-Ali with it. The latter, without malice, tore the weapon from his hands, but, in struggling with him, through an almost inexplicable fatality, struck him on the side. Kerim fell, bathed in his blood. A few minutes later he expired.

In despair, the innocent murderer completely lost his head. The other *ferrashes*, who had witnessed the act and were sure it was accidental, hastened to shelter him from the dangers of the first moment. They pushed him into the stable, and Gamber-Ali, running in, fell against the right leg of His Highness's favourite horse and determined not to leave this inviolable refuge for the rest of his days.

Two hours later, he was a little calmer. The assistant under-cook had confided to him, under seal of the greatest secrecy, that the brother of the dead boy, with two cousins, had come to the palace. They had spoken to the *ferrash-bashi* and he, in front of every one, had asked them how they expected to make good their right. They had answered that either the mur-

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

derer should be handed over to them to be made an end of, according to their fancy, or fifty *tomans*. "Fifty *tomans*!" the *ferrash-bashi* had answered contemptuously. "Fifty *tomans* for the worst of my men, who would have killed himself in a month! May your goodness not diminish! You are jeering at the world! If you want ten *tomans*, I will give them myself, so they will not trouble my poor Gamber-Ali."

That is what the scullion, Kassem, told him, and Gamber-Ali was delighted with the favourable turn of his affair. He wondered at the blindness of his chief where he was concerned. But he was so amiable himself, that he could understand this. He spoke for a long while to his friend; then towards midnight he lay down in the litter next to the sacred horse and slept profoundly. All of a sudden, a vigorous hand shook him by the shoulder; he opened his eyes and before him stood the *mirakhor*, chief of the manger, a redoubtable personage, in charge of the horses and stables in every great house, and whom even the *djelodars*, or equerries, obey.

"Boy," he said to Gamber-Ali, "decamp from here and be quick, unless you have fifty *tomans* to give your master, the *ferrash-bashi*, and the same to Assad-Oullah, the *pishkedmet*, and as much to your slave. If you don't wish to do this, or cannot, out with you!"

"But they will kill me!" cried the poor devil.

"What do I care! Pay or get out!"

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

While speaking, the *mirakhor*, who was a giant, a Kurd Mafi, a true son of the devil, as his companions boasted, lifted Gamber-Ali by the neck as easily as he would have lifted a chicken and dragged him, in spite of his shrieks and struggles, to the door of the stable. There, looking at him with tiger's eyes, he shouted:

"Pay or go!"

"I have nothing!" howled Gamber-Ali, and, by a rare chance, he spoke the truth. He had lost his last penny that morning at play.

"Well, in that case," answered his terrible conqueror, "go and let Kerim's relatives bleed you like a sheep!"

He shook his victim vigorously and threw him into the court; then went back into the stable and closed the door. Gamber-Ali, at the height of dismay, at first thought he was in the midst of enemies; the moon shone brightly, the sky was beautifully clear, the roofs of the city were lit by its rays, the trees swayed gently, the stars were hung like lamps in an atmosphere where the infinite stretched out above them. But Gamber-Ali did not feel in the least inclined to be exalted by the beauties of nature. He only felt that the silence was profound: the hostlers were asleep here and there under their blankets. His excessive terror gave Bibi-Djanem's son a sudden inspiration and a kind of courage. Without thinking further, he ran to the entrance of the court and out; he ran quickly

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

through the streets, turned to the left and found himself against the city walls. It was not difficult to discover a breach in them, and he let himself down into the moat and climbed up the counterscarp. Then, with the utmost speed, he set out across the desert. The jackals were whining, but this did not bother him. One or two hyenas showed him their phosphorescent eyes and fled before him. People of vivid imagination can feel only one thing at a time. Gamber-Ali was too afraid of Kerim's relatives to fear anything else. He ran without stopping, without taking breath, for three hours, and it was nearly day as he entered the tiny hamlet of Shah-Abdul-Azim. He did not glance at the houses but hastened his flight and arrived safely in front of the mosque, as the day was being born; he swiftly opened the door and threw himself upon the tomb of the Saint. Then, feeling that he was saved, he quietly fainted.

Abdul-Azim, in his days, was a very pious personage, agnate or cognate with Their Highnesses Hasan and Hosain, sons of His Highness, cousin of the Prophet, may salvation and blessings be upon him! The merits of Abdul-Azim are immense, but, at that moment, Gamber-Ali appreciated only one, which is that the mosque with the gilded dome, built over the Saint's tomb, is an inviolable sanctuary for all. Thus Gamber-Ali was as safe as he had been eighteen years before in the womb of Bibi-Djanem. After he was rested, and

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

had recovered from his swoon, he sat down at the foot of the tomb. He was not alone; a man with a filthy dirty face was at his side.

"Calm yourself," said this fellow. "Whoever your persecutors may be, you are in perfect safety here, as much as I."

"May your goodness not diminish!" replied Gamber-Ali. "May I dare to ask your noble name?"

"I call myself Mirza-Riza," said the stranger, with an air of assurance. "I am a European, a Frenchman, and my compatriots call me Monsieur Brichard. But I became a Muslim, by God's grace, to arrange a few little matters of business that caused me some annoyance, and the minister of my country has the baseness to want me to leave Persia. Consequently, I remain here, so as not to fall into his hands, and I perform miracles to prove the grandeur of our august religion."

"Blessings on you!" said Gamber-Ali devoutly; but he was afraid of this unfrocked European and resolved to watch him carefully. The visit of the guardian of the mosque, which took place during the morning, was more agreeable to him. He was given something to eat and promised a good fare every day, dispensed through the endowment of the place, and guaranteed that no one would disturb him in the venerable sanctuary to which he had had the good fortune to withdraw. They even tried to persuade him not to



## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

confine himself in the interior of the mosque; he could ramble about the courts without fear, and even tread on the toes of the chief of police; but this did not satisfy him. In vain, the fairly numerous refugees, living on the larger part of the consecrated land and keeping house in every corner, offered him the attraction of a friendly and sprightly conversation and a thousand occasions for a little trade; he was too frightened and wished never to leave the holy tomb. It was easy for the others to rely on moderate protection! After all, what had they done? Stolen from some merchant? Swindled their master? Insulted a subordinate employé? It was clear that for such peccadillos the prerogatives of the mosque would not be violated to the indignation of the clergy and the populace. But he! That was quite a different matter. He had the misfortune to have fallen on that idiot of a Kerim who had stupidly allowed himself to die. He was stained with blood, and the enmity of the scoundrelly *ferash-bashi* pursued him. He could not be sufficiently protected by the ashes of the Imam in the tomb: the Imam ought to have risen from the dead and come in person. He persisted in keeping Mirza-Riza company. The two brave men lived in perpetual vigilance. Every new face that appeared in the mosque was a spy to them; Gamber-Ali thought he recognized, in each one, an emissary from the Prince's household, and his companion thought it was some one from the minis-

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

ter. Two deplorable existences! The poor souls were visibly growing thinner.

One morning, there was a great stir and both the refugees thought they were lost; the guardians told them the King had announced his intention of paying his devotions that very day to Shah-Abdul-Azim. Consequently, they were cleaning a little, lightly dusting and laying the rugs. The population of the town was excited. Mirza-Riza communicated a very good idea to his comrade; this was that they should be careful not to be carried away by their persecutors under cover of the tumult at the arrival, the stay and departure of his very exalted Presence, the King of Kings. The son of Bibi-Djanem thought this was a reasonable observation, and from the moment it took possession of his mind he pressed himself tightly against the stone of the tomb and did not move his shoulders except to come closer. In the meantime, the noise outside became tremendous. The sound of small cannons, mounted on camels, reverberated on all sides. One could hear the hautboys and tambourines begin from far off, then increase and then burst forth. This was the music of the artillery, called *zambourek*; a crowd of royal *ferrashes* and runners, in red tunics and big, high hats, ornamented with spangles, dashed forward into the mosque. Following them, more slowly, came the *ghoulams*, noble horsemen, decorated with gold chains and with guns on their shoulders, and then

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

the higher servants and aides-de-camp and the Lords of Intimacy, the *mogerrebs-ul-hezret*, those who were near to the Presence, the *mogerrebs-ul-Khagan*, those who were near to the Sovereign, and finally the sovereign himself, Nasrud-Din-Shah, the Kadjar, son of the sultan, grandson of the sultan, appeared and approached the shrine. A prayer-rug was laid under his august feet and the ruler of the State executed a number of *rikaats*, bows, genuflexions and ejaculatory prayers, according as his piety, the condition of his personal affairs, and the inclination of the moment suggested.

But, in the midst of the tumult, which did not diminish, and, absorbed as the Prince was in his devotions, it was impossible for him not to see the two livid faces fortifying themselves under the protection of the Saint, to whose intervention he himself was having recourse. The first, Mirza-Riza, was known to him and he did not interfere in his affair. The second was quite new to him; his handsome face, his pallor, his evident distress, his youth, interested him, and when he had finished his prayers he asked the guardian of the mosque who that man was and why he held himself against the Imam's tomb in that fashion.

The compassionate guardian of the mosque told Gamber-Ali's adventure to the King in the way most likely to excite his pity. He succeeded easily and the High Presence said to the poor devil:

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

“Come, in God’s name, get up and go! Nothing will be done to you!”

That was doubtless enough, and Gamber-Ali should have understood that in the shade of the sovereign protection, so miraculously extended to him, he need hereafter have no fear. But he did not see the light where it was. His mind was so troubled that he imagined the most absurd things. He thought the King only spoke thus to him to make him leave his refuge, and that the order had been given to the *ghoulams* to cut his throat at the door of the mosque. How could he have been persuaded that his master himself would condescend to be an accomplice of Kerim’s relatives? It was one of those follies that are born in a sick brain. Instead of throwing himself at his sovereign’s feet and covering him with blessings, which would have yielded a generous alms, he began to shriek pitifully and invoke the Prophets and all the saints, declaring that they could massacre him if they liked, on the spot, but that he would not go away.

The King had the kindness to reason with him. He tried to reassure him and repeated, many times, that he had nothing to fear from any one, that thenceforth his life was safe. But naturally, as the High Presence could not persuade him, he became impatient and, letting a terrible glance fall on Gamber-Ali, he said to him harshly:

“Die, then, son of a dog, since you wish to do so!”

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

At that, the High Presence went away and his suite left the church. In order not to lose any time, Gamber-Ali, certain that his last moment was approaching, and using his utmost resources, undid the stuff that served him as a belt, tore it in several strips, made a rope of it, fastened one end of the cord around his body and the other around the tomb to prolong his resistance when the executioners came. He was also afraid—of what was he not afraid?—that in order to do away with him most easily and without scandal they might put a narcotic in the food the guardians of the mosque gave him. He determined not to eat any more at all. So that day he refused nourishment. The kindest supplications of the priests, the encouragement of the devout, of the usual visitors to the mosque who, each in turn, asked for his story—nothing moved him. He was obstinate.

At night, he no longer slept, his ear was on the watch. Every noise, the wind rustling in the foliage of the trees, the least thing made him frantic.

During the next day, he lay on the pavement, only raising his head from time to time to see whether his rope had been detached; then he dropped his forehead on his hands again and passed into a half sleep, full of menacing hallucinations.

Meanwhile, in all the homes of Teheran, on the squares, in the bazaar and baths, his adventure was the only topic of conversation. The recital of his talk

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

with the King was bruited abroad, augmented, modified, changed, embellished in every way, and served for a text and interminable commentaries. Some said he had assassinated Kerim intentionally; others maintained, on the contrary, that it was Kerim who had wanted to kill him and that he had only defended himself. A third, better informed, was sure Kerim had never existed and that poor Gamber-Ali was the victim of a calumny on the part of the *ferrash-bashi*, his Prince and Assad-Oullah, the *pishkedmet*. The women, hearing rumours of the remarkable beauty of the refugee at Shah-Abdul-Azim, were on his side; and as all wanted to see him, on the third day, from early dawn, bands of ladies, some mounted on donkeys, others on mules and some on horses, with men- and maid-servants, in short, the entire feminine population, set out for the Holy Mosque. The multitude was so great that from the city gate to the little hamlet there was no break in the unending line of feminine pilgrims. This crowd soon filled the mosque and trampled, crowded and climbed over each other to have the happiness of at least gazing at Gamber-Ali. They kept shouting:

“How handsome he is! Bless his mother! My son, eat! My son, drink! My beloved uncle, do not let him die! Oh, my adored brother! Do you want to break my heart? Gamber-Ali of my soul! Here are preserves! Here is sugar! Here is milk! Here are cakes!



## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

Speak to me! Look only at me! Listen to me! No one will touch you! On my head, my eyes, upon the life of my children! Whoever dares to look crossly at you, we shall cut to pieces!"

But Gamber-Ali did not answer a syllable to these reassuring words. He was exhausted from his emotions and from hunger, and, in truth, he was gently on his way to the crossing of the bridge of Sirat, the path of the dead.

The women, young and old, married and single, travelled to Shah-Abdul-Azim. They were a stream of blue veils and *rubends*, a winding line of white heads entering and leaving the sacred holy place, wringing their hands in grief for the imminent loss of the handsomest young man that had ever lived, when, all of a sudden, at the city gate, the soldiers on guard suddenly left their *kalians*, rose and bowed deeply. One horseman, two, three horsemen, briskly crossed the bridge over the moat; behind them, at the same pace, came a group of well-mounted servants and behind these, raising clouds of dust, appeared a very elegant European carriage drawn by six big Turkoman horses, decorated with red and blue topknots, with outriders. In the carriage were four ladies, entirely covered by their blue veils and their *rubends*. This gallant apparition opened a way for itself across the cavalcade of donkeys and mules, so that it soon reached Shah-Abdul-Azim. The *kaleskedjis*, or outriders, stopped before the main door

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

of the mosque; the horsemen helped the four ladies to descend and the latter immediately entered the holy place. Here again their servants were not slow in opening a way for them, and, in spite of the shouts and curses of the women who were thrown roughly aside, the new arrivals, as they wished, were presently face to face with Gamber-Ali.

One of them kneeled down at the side of the young man and said to him in a gentle voice:

“You have nothing to fear, my soul! Kerim’s relatives have compromised for thirty *tomans*; here are your letters of pardon; no one has any right over your life any more. Come and follow me. I gave the thirty *tomans*.”

But Gamber-Ali was no longer in a condition to understand anything. He looked with a dull eye at the paper the lady presented to him, and made no move. Then, showing herself a woman of action, his benefactress raised her voice and said to her people:

“Call the guardian of the mosque at once!”

This dignitary was not far off; he hurriedly approached and, as one of the cavaliers had whispered a few words in his ear, he bowed as profoundly as the gate-keepers of the city had done and declared that his life corresponded with his obeisance.

“Here is the letter of deliverance for this man,” said the lady. “As he is in no condition to understand anything now, I will take him away in my carriage.

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

It is not, I hope, violating the holy sanctuary, for, since he is no longer guilty or pursued, he cannot be a refugee. What do you think of it?"

"Whatever it pleases Your Excellency to command is necessarily good," answered the old priest.

"Then you consent to what I ask?"

"On my eyes!"

The lady made a sign and the cavaliers began to detach the cord and to lift Gamber-Ali in their arms. Immediately the latter began to cry out piteously. His mournful voice touched the women in the mosque, several of whom had been annoyed at the abrupt manners of the *ghoulams* accompanying the unknown, and a murmur arose in which the following reproaches could be distinguished:

"What an infamy! There is no more Islam. Help, Muslims! The sanctuary is being violated! Who is that old famished ghoul who wants to eat young men? Daughter of a dog! Daughter of a father burning in hell! We will roast your grandfather! Leave the boy! If you touch him, or even look at him, we will tear you with our nails and teeth!"

The anger grew more intense. The servants of the lady surrounded her and her attendants isolated them from aggressions. In justice to the lady, it must be said that her courage rose to the occasion. She answered insult for insult and showed herself no less imaginative in this than her assailants. They called her old,

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

she called her enemies decrepit; they suspected the purity of her intentions, she replied by the most atrocious accusations. In this passionate colloquy, between members of the weak and timid sex, treasures of abusive language were lavished, and it is no exaggeration to say that the most respectable and erudite amongst the fishwives who form one of the principal ornaments of Paris and London could have learnt something that day. Nothing is as polished, measured and flowery as the language of an oriental man, but the oriental woman prides herself in expressing as energetically as possible what she has to say.

To put an end to this scene, the guardian of the mosque took the letter of pardon, mounted the *member*, or pulpit, uttered a short preamble, read the document, praised, in pompous phrases, the charity, virtue, goodness, and all the cardinal and principal virtues, immaculate and otherwise, which adorned these veiled and pure beings whom the tongue could not name, and the imagination could not contemplate even in a dream, and ended with an eloquent appeal to leave the court free for the exercise of the said virtues and said charity; for if Gamber-Ali were not immediately taken care of he would not live more than a few hours longer.

At this lugubrious conclusion, tears burst forth on all sides. Some of the women began to beat themselves violently on their chests, with their fists, crying:

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

“Hasan! Hosain! Ya Hasan! Ya Hosain!” (Invocations to the sainted martyrs.) Others fell into convulsions; those closest to the unknown lady, precisely the ones who had declared their fixed intention of tearing her with their nails and teeth, began to kiss the end of her veil and said she was an angel from heaven and certainly as remarkable for her youth and beauty as for the perfection of her heart and that they would help her to hold Gamber-Ali, who was struggling but was nevertheless carried into the carriage, where the blinds were pulled down. This done, the cavaliers mounted their horses, the *kaleskadjis* whipped their teams, pulled the reins around, took the road for Teheran again, and disappeared.

The son of Bibi-Djanem had completely fainted away in the belief that he was done for, that he had been taken and was going to be killed. Enfeebled beyond measure by his state of mind and his fast, he became very ill, and fever and delirium took possession of him. In his conscious moments, he thought he was in prison, although the appearance of the room he was in was not such as to confirm this sad feeling. It was a charming room. The walls were painted white and the regular square recesses for caskets and flower-vases were framed with rose and gold paintings, relieved with light green. The bed had huge covers, quilted in red silk, and many pillows and cushions, large and small, covered with fine embroidered linen, were tucked

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

under his head and arms. He was taken care of by a negress, old and truly ugly, but very kindly, who obeyed each of his demands, pampered him and called him uncle and her soul and did not resemble an executioner at all. Two or three times a day, a *hakim-bashi*, or chief doctor, visited him. He was a Jew well-known to him as the practitioner fashionable in society, and he could not help acknowledging to himself that the mere fact of being treated by Hakim-Massi constituted a real honour of which he could be proud. With his usual kindness, Hakim-Massi had said to him that all was going well, that he would be on his feet in a few days and that his recovery would be all the quicker if he would realize that he had nothing to fear from Kerim's relatives, from the King, or any one else. These assurances, from a person so distinguished as Hakim-Massi, impressed the young man, and as the negress confirmed them each day his clouded imagination gradually cleared. As soon as the patient was able to enjoy distractions, he was visited by a very amiable molla who congratulated him on his fortunate destiny; by a merchant, very well known in the bazaar, who offered him a pretty turquoise ring; by a seventh cousin of the chief of the *Sylsupurs* who invited him to go falcon-hunting when he had entirely recovered. As soon as he got up, he learnt from the negress that he had four servants to wait upon him and that he could fearlessly ask for anything he liked.



## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

"But, aunt of my soul," finally cried Gamber-Ali, "where am I? Who are you? Is it possible that they cut my throat without my knowing it? Am I already in paradise?"

"It all depends on you, my son," answered the negress, "to manage so that it will be so, and that without much trouble to you. In any case, for the time being, you are certainly an important personage, since you are a *nazir*, for you are the chief steward of the fortune and domain of Her Highness, Pervaneh-Hanum (Madame Butterfly), who eight days ago received from the King's favour the official title of *Lezzet-Eddouleh* (the Delights of Power)."

At these words, Gamber-Ali sank into such waves of ecstasy that he was absolutely without pulse, without breath or words.

The first time he appeared in the palace courtyard, the servants lined up before him, naturally, according to their hieratic rank. All bowed with profoundest respect to him, as he passed them in review, in accordance with the duties of his post. He was dressed in an enormous *djubbah*, or coat with sleeves of white cloth laced with striped silk; under this he wore a cashmere dress, and now and then, quite unaffectedly, he drew from his bosom a little satin bag embroidered in pearls from which he took out a pretty watch and looked at the time. His trousers were of red silk. In short, he was dressed to his perfect satisfaction.

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

When he wanted to walk in the Bazaar, a charming horse was led out to him, harnessed, like those of the lords of the court. One of the *djelodars* supported him under the arm so that he could mount into the saddle, and four *ferrashes* walked before him, while at his side his *kaliandji* carried his pipe. He was recognized from the balconies and a concert of blessings resounded as he passed by. The women especially showered him with compliments. In truth, they asked him many indiscreet questions which made him blush and gave him recommendations and counsels which he thought he did not need. But, on the whole, he was delighted with his popularity. He had reason to be. This proves, in passing, for the people who want a moral for every story, that true merit is always rewarded in the end.

Everything led one to think that Gamber-Ali developed superior qualities in the profession of steward, for he gradually passed into a condition of relative riches and then to one of obvious opulence. A year had hardly passed when he rode only blooded horses; on his fingers he wore rubies, sapphires, and diamonds of the finest water. If an unusual pearl arrived at one of the principal jewellers', he was quickly told of it, and it was seldom that he did not become the happy purchaser of the treasure. The affairs of the former governor of Shiraz turned out badly; the *ferrash-bashi* and Assad-Oullah-Bey were without employment. Not for long; Gamber-Ali, now Gamber-Ali-Khan, took

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

them into his service and declared he was well satisfied with their zeal.

As soon as he saw he was in a fortunate position, he lost no time in sending for his parents. Unfortunately, his father died just as he was setting forth. The despair of Bibi-Djanem broke all bounds; she tore her face in such a transport and shrieked so piercingly on the tomb of the defunct that, according to her friends, there had never been such a faithful woman in the whole world or one so devoted to her duties. However, she joined her son and was charmed to find him handsome and in good form. But she did not live in the palace because, without being able to explain why, though she was so accomplished a person, she did not please the princess. She had a house for herself alone and chose it near the great mosque, where she soon gained a reputation of being a most worthy example of devotion and very well informed as to what was going on in the quarter. It must be said to her glory that she never suffered a fault of her neighbours to be ignored, she gave the most widespread publicity to all the acts and deeds of every one about her, male and female, and remained the most incomparable tattle-tale.

At the end of two years, the Princess, no less pious than Bibi-Djanem, felt the desire of making a holy pilgrimage to Mecca. Having resolved upon this, she declared that honest Gamber-Ali-Khan should be her

## *The Story of Gamber-Ali*

husband for the journey. The husband for the journey is incontestably one of the wisest Persian institutions. A woman of quality, about to make a long trip from city to city, can well sacrifice her tranquillity and undergo trouble for the safety of her soul. Nevertheless, she considers propriety and cannot enter into direct relations with the muleteers, merchants, customs officials and authorities of the places through which she passes. That is why, when she has no husband, she takes one for this occasion. It is understood that the happy mortal is no more than an authorized major-domo. What more could he want? Gamber-Ali was an important man. In short, he set off with the Delights of Power, and she was so satisfied with his integrity and his way of keeping accounts that she married him for good, and it is charitable to suppose that she never had reason to regret it. This, in any case, is what Bibi-Djanem said.

The story ends here. It has often been told with variations by the admirable and profound astrologer who was mentioned in the beginning. He used to cite it as an irrefutable proof of the soundness of his art. Had he not predicted, on the day of Gamber-Ali's birth, that the nursling would be first minister? To be sure, he is not that yet, but why should he not reach this pinnacle?

THE END







